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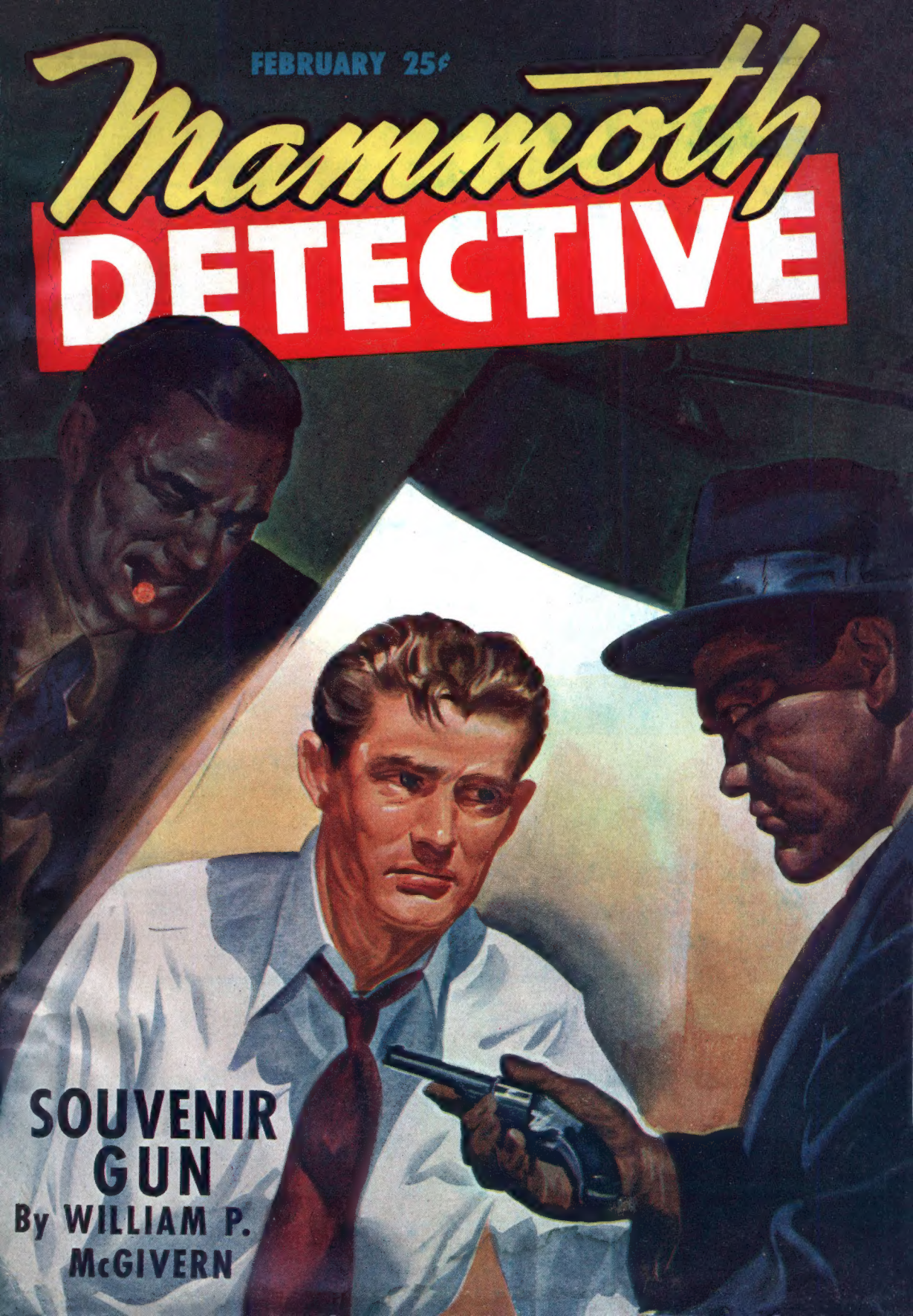

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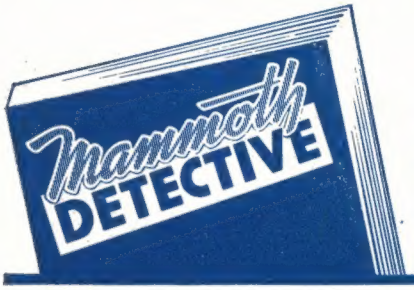

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Illustrated by Arnold Kohn
Somewhere in that great city was the girl he loved. But a sinister wall stood between them . . .

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Illustrated by Henry Sharp
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What made this case especially difficult was that Rick must decide whether the killer should be freed.

. . . BUT IS IT ART? (Short—9,300) ..... by Harrison B. Latimer ... 152
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Mrs. Frobish bought a painting with peculiar properties: whoever examined it too closely died . . .

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Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn illustrating a scene from "Souvenir Gun"

MAMMOTH DETECTIVE

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Volume 6
Number 2

FROM the way the letters poured in from you readers praising Frank Gruber's "The Honest Dealer," which appeared in the December issue of Mammoth Detective, it appears that every admirer of his "Johnny Fletcher" character must have rushed out and bought a copy of the magazine the day it reached the stands. Anyway, because of the enthusiasm with which you welcomed Johnny in these pages, we asked Gruber for the next novel about the "How to be Strong" book salesman, offering him a corner of the U. S. Mint for the magazine rights. No author can resist money, so Gruber said, "It's a deal," and you'll be reading another yarn about Fletcher and Cragg before many more months have passed.

BECAUSE we've spent the last couple of weeks hanging around hospital corridors and rooms where our wife (sounds like polygamy) lies in a cast slightly smaller than the *U.S.S. Missouri,* your editor just was able to get this issue under the wire. We'd like to say the reason we worked straight through two nights was to keep from depriving you of your favorite detective magazine; but the true reason is that this editor is very fond of his job (there's hardly any work connected with it at all) and wants to keep it!

IT ISN'T often that this department goes all out in recommending book mystery novels (except those first appearing in Mammoth Detective!). But we've just finished reading one of the best mystery stories ever to appear in print and you'd probably enjoy it just as much. The title is "Blood on Biscayne Bay," by Brett Halliday, and the publisher is Ziff-Davis. This is another of the popular "Michael Shayne" series, and is without question the best of them all. It's on sale at book stores everywhere.

"The night of February third? What time?"

NOW to the stories in this issue: William P. McGivern, who has been monopolizing our covers lately, leads off with "Souvenir Gun"—a novelette about a guy who lost his girl and turned a big city upside down to find her. Here's a yarn that has that rare quality of suspense that takes a real writer to build successfully. The unexpected climax to the story hinges on a strange quirk in a man's character, which adds to the entertainment value of the tale.

SEVEN or eight months ago we took a business trip to New York City. During that time we took a bus over to New Jersey to call on Larry Holden, who writes a series of short stories about Dinny Keogh, a private eye, and which appear in our sister publication *Mammoth Mystery*. Anyway, we spent an afternoon talking plots, listening to records and drinking—if memory serves correctly—tall glasses of milk. A couple of months later, in came a manuscript from Holden titled "Those Slaughterhouse Blues." It's about a detective magazine editor who went to New York on a business trip and made a visit to New Jersey to see one of his writers. . . . Turn to page 32 and start reading to learn what kind of a guy an editor *isn't*.

H. B. HICKEY, who knows his business and takes it seriously, gives you "The Wrong Witness," a novelette that ranks with the best of his works. It's about a man who drank too much one night and started making friends out of strangers. But it seems one of those strangers was out to make enemies. . . .

A NEW name to these pages, but one you will want to see there again and again, is Paul Fairman. He presents "Late Rain," one of the toughest, fastest moving and best written jobs we've ever read. Maybe we have a "find" in Fairman; what's your opinion in the matter?

—*H. B.*

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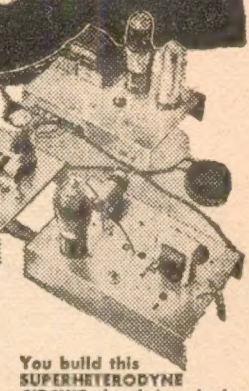

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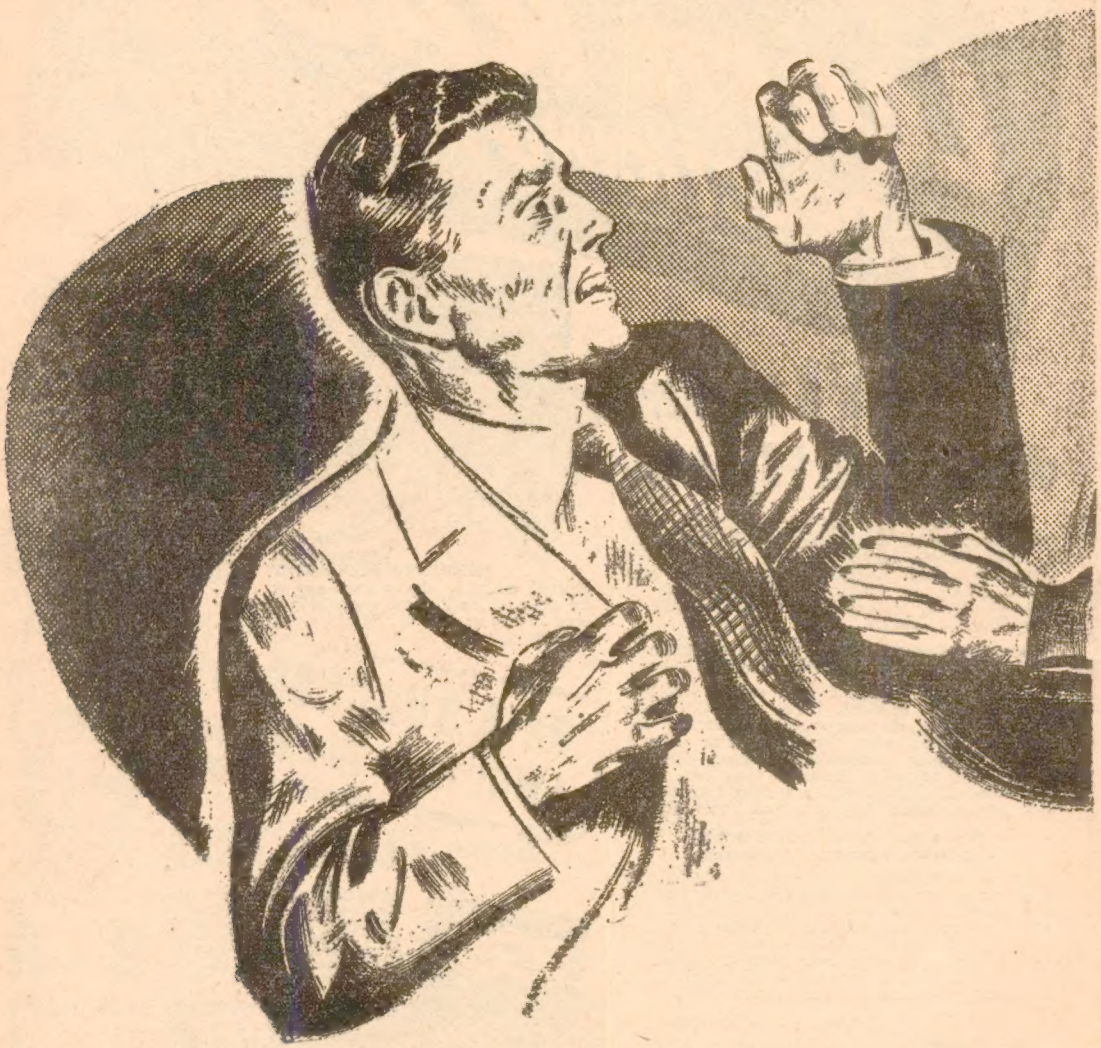
Souvenir Gun

by William P. McGivern



He wasn't the first returning soldier to find his girl had "taken a powder." But was it her own idea?

She closed in on the doctor, who fell back in terror as the huge knife flashed back

HE WAS still wearing his uniform when he entered the cocktail lounge of the Manhattan hotel. People by that time were pretty accustomed to uniforms and decorations; in fact, just a little tired of them. But the young men wearing discharge buttons looked twice when they saw the four rows of fruit salad over his left breast pocket. They spotted the Medal of Honor, the DSC and some of them even recognized Holland's Order of William, the French *Croix de Guerre* and the Belgian *Fouragere.*

A display like that was still worth a second glance.

The head waiter approached him. "May I help you, sir?"

The young man didn't seem to hear. He was looking from table to table with an expression that was a blend of eagerness and uncertainty.

The headwaiter tried again. "Are you going to be alone, sir?"

The young man looked at him then. "I'm sorry. I was looking for someone. But I guess I'm a little early. I'd like a table for two. There's a girl meeting

me here in a little while. She's about medium height, blonde and pretty. She'll be wearing a corsage of white camelias and—"

"I'll watch for her," the head waiter said. "Will you come with me, please?"

The young man followed the head waiter to a glass-topped table for two, in a corner of the softly lighted room. A waiter came to the table at a nod from the head waiter, placed a cocktail napkin and clean ash tray on the table and took a check and pencil from his pocket. He looked inquiringly at the young man in uniform.

"Martini, I guess," the young man said.

"Certainly."

When the drink came he sipped it slowly. He lit a cigarette and leaned back against the cushioned wall of the booth and let his eyes stray around the room. The place was just the same. Quiet, courteous waiters, dim lights that changed slowly from color to color, giving you the impression you were sitting in a room lighted by a rainbow.

This was where he'd met Jean. Four . . . no, five years ago. Some advertising people were in there for cocktails one fall afternoon and he'd found himself sitting beside her. He could recall almost every word of their conversation.

"I'm Jean O'Neill," she said. "Are you anybody?"

"If you mean with a capital A, no."

"Got a name?"

"Sure. They were cheap so I took two. Jerry Evans."

"Didn't they throw in a nickname for nothing?"

"In school they called me Pickles."

"Why?"

"No reason. Are you doing anything tonight?"

He remembered the way her eyes crinkled and the smile that lighted her face. That was one of the best things about her. That friendly, mischievous grin.

"I'm very busy tonight. I'm finishing a serial story in the *Post*."

"I read it. Have dinner with me and I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh, that wouldn't be the same. But did Imogene marry Maurice?"

"No you don't. It's dinner or I won't talk."

He'd thought she was just another of the butterflies that flitted around the bars and lounges. He learned in the next few months how wrong about her he was.

THAT was in 'forty. When he left for the army a year later she was the only thing that mattered in his life. She said she'd wait, and she wrote every day. They'd decided to meet when he got back in the lounge of the Manhattan Hotel. The place they'd met. A silly, romantic idea. But he liked it. It seemed like a fine idea.

He had been scheduled to return to the States almost a year ago, but they had needed his testimony at the Nurnberg trials. For the last four months he hadn't heard from Jean, but he'd been moving around so much he figured his mail hadn't caught up with him.

But he had written her when he'd arrive and he knew she wouldn't forget.

He ordered another Martini and glanced at his watch. Almost two thirty. She should be along any minute now . . .

At three o'clock he had another drink. He wasn't worried, but he was getting nervous. The head waiter came by and smiled at him.

"Is everything all right?"

"Fine, but don't forget to keep your eyes open for my girl. She should be along any minute."

"Of course, sir. I won't forget."

He had another drink or two and when he looked at his watch again, he

felt sure it wasn't working. He held it to his ear. Yes, it was okay. But he had trouble realizing it was four o'clock and Jean hadn't arrived.

Two hours late . . . That wasn't like her.

He got up and went to a telephone booth alongside the service bar. Maybe she was still working. Possibly she hadn't gotten his letter, had no idea he was in town. He had to look up the number. It had been so long since he'd called. . . .

A remote feminine voice said, "This is the Hicks Organization. Good afternoon."

"I'd like to talk to Jean O'Neill, please," he said.

There was a pause. Then: "Jean O'Neill? One moment, please. I'll connect you with Personnel."

There was another wait. Then a man's voice, crisp and hurried, was on the wire. "Yes, what is it?"

"I want to speak to Jean O'Neill," Jerry said again.

"I'm sorry but she's not here any more. Left about two months ago."

"Well, where did she go?"

"You got me. I haven't heard anything since she left here. Who is this?"

"This is Jerry Evans. I—I just got back home. I'm looking for Jean."

Well, I'm sorry I can't help you, old man. I've heard Jean talk about you. But I don't have the faintest idea where she is now. She left here one day and just didn't come back."

Jerry felt something cold go through him. He realized he was gripping the receiver so tightly that his knuckles whitened.

"Well, she wouldn't just walk out," he said. "She must have told you where she was going."

"But she didn't. Sorry."

Jerry hung up slowly. It didn't make sense. Unless she'd been ill or something . . .

He knew the address where she lived. Knew it by heart. He'd written that address a thousand times on letters to her. It was in the sixty hundred block, south. But there wasn't a phone.

He left the phone and headed toward the entrance. The head waiter smiled again.

"Shall I hold the table for two, sir?"

"I don't think so," Jerry said. "I—we've made other plans. Thanks."

HE WENT through the lobby fast and took the stairs to the street two at a time. He waved for a taxi. He gave the driver the address and settled back with a cigarette. He tried to relax. He told himself there was nothing to get excited about. But it didn't work. The cigarette tasted like it was made from the sweepings of a barnyard. And something inside him stayed cold and hollow.

The address was in a fairly good residential neighborhood. Jerry had been here often. Jean had a two-room apartment in a boarding house, a comfortable enough arrangement, which she liked particularly because there was a small kitchenette and she could do her own cooking.

Jerry paid the driver and went up the steps. He rang the bell and it was opened a few seconds later by the landlady, a Mrs. Grady, a kind Irishwoman, whom Jerry had met half a dozen times, at least.

She looked the same, except her hair had gotten grayer. But she was still plump and red-cheeked, with bright blue eyes and a square, uncompromising jaw.

She looked at him a moment and then she smiled broadly and held out both her hands.

"Jerry Evans, the Saints preserve us! It's a wonderful sight you are.

Come right in this minute."

Jerry went into the big dim parlor and let her flutter around a bit, getting him seated, before he said, "Mrs. Grady, where's Jean?"

"I was afraid you'd be asking that," she said slowly.

He felt his body go tense and he tried to keep his voice steady. "Has—did anything happen to her?"

"Not that I know of," she answered. "But I was hoping you'd tell me where she is. Six weeks ago to the day she left for work as usual. She didn't come back that night, but I wasn't worried. She sometimes stayed with girl friends and, not having a phone here, there was no way she could let me know. But when she didn't show up the next night I called her office. They told me she hadn't been to work the day before. They knew nothing about her. Well I let another day go by, then I called the police. They haven't been able to do a thing."

"But that's impossible," Jerry said. His voice sounded loud and strained to his ears. "People just don't vanish. She must have gone somewhere. She must have told someone where she was going. Had she been worried about anything? Did she take any clothes with her?"

"Just what she had on her back, the poor lamb. And if she was worried about anything, she didn't show it. She was just as cheerful as a lark the morning she left."

"Have you notified her relatives? They may know where she is?"

"The only family she has is a brother in Milwaukee. The police got in touch with him, but he didn't know anything. She never visited him or wrote to him, and he didn't seem too worried about what happened to her. I guess they weren't getting along."

"Have the police contacted her brother lately?" Jerry asked.

"Yes. I believe they sent a man down to see him. But he didn't know anything about her. The last time he had heard from her was a year or so ago."

Jerry lit a cigarette and tried to keep himself under control. But he couldn't fight down the terror he felt.

"Mrs. Grady, this is crazy," he said. His voice was ragged and close to breaking. "Jean wouldn't do a thing like this. She knew I was coming home. Something must have happened to her. Didn't she tell you anything about being worried, or being in trouble, or something?"

"Not a thing, Jerry. She left for work that morning just as she had for the last four years. She was cheery and gay. The night before, we'd been talking about you. She was saying then how glad she'd be when you got back."

Jerry put his hands over his face. He didn't trust himself to speak. He felt empty and cold inside. All the life in him seemed to be gone.

He felt Mrs. Grady's hand on his shoulder, heard her warm voice saying, "You'll get her back, Jerry. I know you will. You've got to find the poor lamb."

Yes, he had to find her, but how? He wouldn't be anything unless he found her. But where was he to look? Where was he to go? She had simply walked out of this house and vanished.

"Would you drink a cup of tea?" Mrs. Grady asked.

"No, thanks. I've got to be going." He stood up and looked down at her worried, anxious face. "I'll look for her," he said. "I'll find her if I have to take this town apart brick by brick."

He said the words evenly, almost softly, but he had never said anything he meant so completely.

OUTSIDE, he stood in the gathering darkness wondering what he could do. It was five-thirty now, too late to go to the office where she had worked.

He got a cab and went to his hotel. There was a liquor store in the lobby and he stopped and bought a quart of rye and a couple of packs of cigarettes.

He went up to his room and turned on one small lamp. The room was small, neat and as impersonal as a finance company's regrets. He pulled the one comfortable chair closer to the window, then poured himself a long drink and put the glass and the bottle on the floor beside the chair. He took off his tunic, tossed it on the bed and loosened his tie.

From the dresser he took a small framed picture of Jean and sat down before the window, holding the picture tightly in both hands.

From his room he had a view of Lake Michigan. The water was gray and the waves that broke against the shore rocks gave it an edge of white lace. A fog was rolling in slowly, creeping quietly toward the city on soft gray paws.

The lights of the cars were little shafts of smoky orange; and the street noises that drifted up to him were muted and indistinct.

The scene had a quality of dimness and gloom, of despair and terror, of the precious things we lose and never find, of the horrible things we find when we look for that which we have lost.

He drank his drink quickly. It had little effect. He could taste the burning liquor, but it did nothing to dispel the cold emptiness inside him.

He looked down at the picture in his hands.

The girl who smiled back at him with a fixed, never-changing smile, was blonde, with softly waved hair, a narrow, piquant face and eyes that crinkled when she laughed. The picture told nothing of her loyalty, her spirit, her courage, or the way her voice broke a little when she was excited, or the way she whistled a bit off-key when she was worrying about something. There was nothing in the picture that told how she loved a guy named Jerry Evans, or how, when he'd left for overseas, she'd clung to him for a moment and whispered his name, then turned so he wouldn't see the tears in her eyes, and walked quickly away, her shoulders held stiff and straight.

He sat drinking and staring at the picture until the bottle was empty. Just as empty as he was inside. The things he'd felt all day, the terror he'd tried to fight, came creeping on him now, as the fog had crept toward the city.

He held the picture tightly against his body and he knew, without shame, without any feeling at all, that he was crying.

"Where are you, baby?" he whispered to the fog and gloom of the city. . . .

CHAPTER II

THE next morning he changed into civilian clothes. Some of his prewar suits still fit fairly well. He had a glass of orange juice and coffee in the hotel restaurant, then took a cab to the Hicks Organization, the firm for whom Jean had worked the last four years.

The building was on North Michigan Boulevard. A slim building of steel and glass that looked like a huge, inverted railway spike. He took an express elevator to the twentieth floor, stepped out into a reception room that was carpeted in thick beige and furnished with chairs and sofas constructed of curved steel tubing. The recep-

tionist went with the room. She was sleek, poised and as modern as tomorrow's newspaper. She looked as if she had been especially created to sit behind a semi-circular desk in a lush reception room and answer an ivory phone in a throaty, impersonal murmur.

She arched her eyebrows at him and smiled. "May I help you?"

"I'm Jerry Evans," he said. "A friend of Jean O'Neill's. I want to talk to someone who might know where she's gone or what happened to her."

"Miss O'Neill worked for Mr. Trask," the receptionist said. "I'll see if he's busy."

She picked up the phone, made a connection. She talked to someone, then smiled again at Jerry.

"Will you go in, please? Mr. Trask will see you. Just follow the corridor all the way. You'll see his name on the door."

"Thanks," Jerry said.

He followed directions. He went down a wide, indirectly-lighted corridor, until he came to a maple door with a fancy bronze doorknob, with the name Mr. Trask on a panel in lower case letters.

He knocked and a voice said, "Come in."

He turned the knob and walked into an office, furnished in about the same fashion as the reception room, with a big window facing the Lake.

There was a desk and behind it a man. A youngish man, with blonde, receding hair, pale blue eyes and even features. He was wearing tweeds, with a white shirt and blue wool knit tie.

"Mr. Evans?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm Jerry Evans. You're Trask?"

"That's right." He came around the desk and put out his hand. "I know why you're here, Evans, and believe me, I'll help you any way I can. Here, have a seat."

Jerry sat down on the edge of a chair. Trask sat on the corner of his desk and fished out a pack of cigarettes. "Smoke?" Jerry took a Camel and Trask gave him a light.

"First," Trask said, "let me tell you all I know. Then you can ask any questions you may have in mind. Okay? Good." He inhaled deeply and frowned at the floor. "The last time I saw Jean was a Wednesday night, August fifteenth. She left the office about four-thirty. She came into the office and told me she was leaving. She worked for me, you know. Actually she worked *with* me; that would express our relationship better. We handle public relations for industrial concerns here, and Jean started as my secretary. But she moved up to a position as my assistant. I tell you, I'm lost without her. Well, anyway, she told me she was leaving and said she'd see me the next morning. The next morning she wasn't down. I didn't worry about that. She had a lot of outside work to do on our accounts and I assumed something had come up which she had to handle. She wasn't in all day. The next day, next afternoon to be exact, her landlady, Mrs. Grady called. She said Jean hadn't been home the previous night. I got worried then. Mrs. Grady notified the police. I went down to the station myself the next day, to see if I couldn't get some action. They were apparently doing everything they could. The Missing Persons Bureau sent out descriptions of her to every station in town. And they wired all near-by cities, train and bus stations to be on the look-out. But nothing turned up. We checked the morgue, we checked all amnesia cases that were reported, but nothing came of it. The last time I saw her was here at the office. We know she went home that night. But there hasn't

been a sign of her since she left Mrs. Grady's the next morning."

He stopped, put out his cigarette, then lit another.

"We've done everything we could think of, Evans. We haven't left a stone unturned."

JERRY stared at the tip of his cigarette. He tried to make his mind function, but it wouldn't. All he could think of was that she was gone. That was what he got everywhere. Simply that she had vanished.

"Didn't she say anything that was unusual?" he asked.

Trask frowned and shook his head slowly. "Not that I can think of. I've gone over in my mind everything I could remember of our conversation. And it was completely normal. Nothing out of the way at all."

"What was she working on at the time? Maybe she took a trip for some reason or other. God, she didn't just evaporate."

"I've thought of that angle, too. I've gone over her files and her work very carefully. She was working on the four accounts I handle. Just routine work. There was a prospectus on her desk for the City Medical Center—an account we hoped to land—but she hadn't been to see them. I've checked the other accounts and she hadn't seen them for a week before she disappared."

"Just what did she do?" Jerry asked. "I'm completely in the dark about her work. She wrote me occasionally about it, but I got the idea it was just a press agent's job or something like that."

Trask smiled a little. "That's about all any of us are. We call ourselves public relations counselors because it sounds more dignified. Our job is to get favorable publicity for the concerns we handle. That's all there is to it."

"How about this City Medical Center?"

"Well that was an account we hoped to land. You see, we don't do anything so vulgar as to solocit business." He smiled again. "But we do go after accounts. We do it subtly though. Jean was preparing a presentation for the Medical Center. I think her angle was to change the rather prevalent opinion that a Medical Center with a family plan and all that, is just one step above the County hospital. She was trying to work out a campaign to convince people that the care rendered by a Medical Center was more complete, more thorough and so forth. She wasn't stressing the economy angle. She was trying the snob approach. You know, more people think it's fashionable to go to a medical center, which is staffed with all kinds of experts, rather than to a general practioner. We do things like that, you know. Hell of a business." He lit another cigarette and frowned at the floor. "But that's all beside the point. The thing is, Jean's gone, and I'll be damned if I can think of a thing that will help you get her back. I've never heard of anything like it in my life."

Jerry got up. There wasn't anything here for him.

"Thanks," he said.

"If you find anything let me know, will you?" Trask said.

"Sure." They shook hands and Jerry left.

HIS next stop was Central Station, at Eleventh and State.

He talked to a desk sergeant, then a plainclothes detective and finally was ushered into the office of Lieutenant Simon Anderson. Anderson was a small, compact man, with a round, smooth face, thinning hair and hard, careful eyes. He wore dark clothes that needed pressing and there was a gener-

ous sprinkling of ash on his vest front.

He nodded to Jerry and pointed to the chair opposite his desk.

"I've been waiting to see you," he said, in a dry, precise voice. "We've been working on this O'Neill case for six weeks without a single lead. Do you know anything that help? Any enemies? Worries? Things like that?"

"I don't know a reason in the world she would disappear," Jerry said. "Her letters were cheerful and happy."

"Well," Anderson said, "that does away with one idea I had. Some women are a little worried about meeting their husbands and fiances after a long absence. They let it get on their minds, they stew about it until it becomes a big problem. A problem they can't face. So they run away and hide. Cause us all kinds of trouble."

"Good God," Jerry said, "Jean wasn't a neurotic. She was a thoroughly normal girl. She wouldn't do an idiotic think like that."

"Lots of 'em have," Anderson said.

"Well that's out for her. Have you done everything possible to find her?"

"Evans, a police department is like a clock. It just keeps ticking along, doing a job. A report comes in that someone is missing and we start ticking along, nothing sensational, but just doing the things experience has taught us should be done. We notify the Missing Persons Bureau, we send out wires and descriptions, we check the person's background, and we keep our eye on the bodies they fish out of the Lake. Well, all those things have been done. But we haven't found a trace of her."

"Are you still working on it?"

"Of course. We'll keep working on it until we find out what happened. But we may never find out."

Jerry got up to go. "I'm going to find out," he said.

On the street, he watched people hurrying past, cars going by, street cars clanging, and the thought came to him that no one gave a damn what happened to Jean but himself. The police didn't care. They were just a ticking clock, doing a job, putting in time. Trask didn't really care. He was mystified and astounded, but he didn't care. He was the only one who really gave a damn. Maybe that's why nothing had been done. Nobody who really cared was looking for her.

He didn't know what he could do. but he wasn't going to stop.

He hailed a cab and gave the driver Mrs. Grady's address. . . .

MRS. GRADY insisted he sit down, have a cup of tea and relax. He sat down, took a rain check on the cup of tea and didn't even try to relax.

"Mrs. Grady, you were the last person to see Jean. The morning she left here she didn't go to work. We know that much. For some reason she changed her mind and went somewhere else. Can't you think of anything she said as she left that would give us some hint as to where she'd go?"

Mrs. Grady shook her head slowly.

"Not a single thing, Jerry. She just left at the usual time. Just as she'd been doin' all these years."

"Well, what time was that?"

"Eight-ten. She always caught the eight-sixteen electric to the Loop."

"That gives me one idea," Jerry said. "Maybe I can find out if she ever got as far as the train station." He picked up his hat and left.

THE station of the Illinois Central suburban wasn't crowded. The girl seated behind the lattice wire window was reading a screen magazine with complete absorption. She was a thin, tired-looking woman of about thirty, with mouse-colored brown hair, a flat

chest and rimless glasses. She looked up from her magazine when Jerry appeared at the window.

"I just want a little information," Jerry said. "I hope you can help me out." He took out his wallet, opened it to a picture of Jean and slid it under the wire-work window toward the girl. "I wonder if you remember seeing this girl. I understand she used to catch a train here every morning. The eight-sixteen, I believe it was."

The girl stared at the picture for a moment, then looked back at him with a surprised smile on her face. "Why, yes, I remember her. But I haven't seen her for a while. She was one of my regulars. She used to always say hello and chat a while. Funny, we see a person every day for years, but we don't miss them if they stop coming. They take vacations and when they come back we know we haven't seen them for a while. What I mean is we don't miss them until they come back." She giggled a little and pushed the wallet back to Jerry.

"This girl is missing," Jerry said.

"Oh, are you from the police?"

"No, I'm her fiancee. I just got out of the army a few days ago."

"How exciting," the girl said. She closed the screen magazine and leaned closer to the window. "What do you suppose happened to her?"

"I have no idea," Jerry said. "She left her room on a Thursday morning, August sixteenth. That was the last time she was seen. What I was hoping is that you could tell me something. Do you remember seeing her that morning?"

"That was six weeks ago," the girl said. She looked thoughtful and tapped a pencil against her prominet front teeth. "It doesn't seem that long ago since I saw her. But that's the way time flies. Now wait a minute. I do remember something." She stopped tapping the pencil and frowned. "I'm not sure this was the last day she was here. But the last time I remember seeing her something funny happened. She came in and we talked a little bit about the weather. It was one of those awfully hot, muggy days. I'd only been here for an hour and my clothes were just hanging on me. You know that limp feeling?"

"Yes, I know," Jerry said impatiently. "What happened?"

"I'm getting to that. She bought a ticket and after we talked a little she went out on the platform. But a minute later she came back and said she had got a lucky break. She was getting a ride downtown."

"Is that all?"

The girl looked a little hurt. "Yes, that's all. I looked out the window behind me, just out of curiosity I guess, and I saw a big black car waiting next to the newspaper stand. I don't know if it was waiting for her. Things got busy and I didn't have time to make sure. When I looked again the car was gone."

"Did you notice what kind of a car it was?"

"Well it was big and black. I think there was a chauffeur driving."

"Was there anyone in the back?"

"I didn't have time to notice. I really couldn't say."

"Well, thanks," Jerry said.

"If you find out what happened to her let me know, will you?"

She leaned forward and her avid smile and prominent teeth reminded Jerry of a hungry rat.

"Sure," he said.

HE WENT outside and down the steps to the street. The day was chilly and gray. There was a wind blowing from the lake and the weak sun-

light that came through the clouds and smoke looked pale and gloomy.

He crossed the street to the newsstand and bought a paper.

The news dealer was a short, stocky man about fifty. He had a cap pulled low over his eyes, a ragged coat buttoned up to his neck and a black oilcloth apron, in which he kept his change. His hands were jammed into the apron now and he rocked a little from foot to foot to keep warm.

"Are you here all day?" Jerry asked.

The man nodded. "Long damn day," he said.

"You should have a union," Jerry said.

The little man raised his head and looked at Jerry. "You think that's funny, bud? Every other guy is in a union. Why ain't we? We work fourteen, fifteen hours a day. We get bunions, we get frostbite, we got no hospital benefits, we slave for a lousy forty bucks a week. Do you know what that is by the hour? Well. I'll tell you! About thirty-eight cents an hour. That's what it is."

"I wasn't kidding," Jerry said. "I meant it."

The little man stopped rocking and looked at Jerry shrewdly. "Yeah, I guess you do. I guess you ain't just a wise guy. Well, what's on your mind?"

"You're sure there's something on my mind?"

"Yeah. You didn't stop and listen to me for a laugh, did you?"

"You're right. I've got something on my mind. My girl disappeared six weeks ago. She came here, like she had every morning for years, to catch the eight-sixteen. But somebody pulled up here alongside your stand in a big black car and offered to give her a lift down town. I learned that much from the girl who sells tickets inside. Do you remember anything like that?"

The little man shook his head slowly. "That's a busy time of the morning. I may have seen it, but I don't remember. Sorry, bud."

"It must have been someone she knew," Jerry said. "She wouldn't get in a car with a stranger. You sure you don't remember?"

"Sorry," the little man said. "I'd like to help you. You seem all right. But it's no go. How long ago was it?"

"Six weeks. It was the morning of August sixteenth. A Thursday."

"That's a long time. I'm sorry."

"That's okay," Jerry said. "I hope you get your union."

"Yeah, thanks."

JERRY walked a block and finally turned into a drugstore and ordered coffee. He had learned something, but how did it help? Someone had picked Jean up at the station. Someone in a big, black car. That was a fine description. Like telling someone you lost a golf ball. A little white one.

He stirred his coffee and tried to think. But nothing came. Jean had vanished, completely, hopelessly. He knew she might be dead, but he kept his thoughts away from that possibility. She had to be alive, somewhere.

He left his coffee and went to the telephone booth. There was one lead he intended to run down. Trask had told him Jean had been working on the City Medical Center account. That was worth checking on. Anything was worth checking on.

He looked up their address in the city directory, then went outside and got a cab.

THE City Medical Center occupied the top floor of a building on the Southwest side of the Loop. Jerry went up in a fast elevator and stepped out into a reception room that had a hospital

look.

A middle- aged woman in a starched nurse's uniform sat behind a desk, which was bare except for a telephone and a small metal filing cabinet.

The floor was gray linoleum, the furniture was functional and the general atmosphere was one of surgical cleanliness.

The woman behind the desk looked at him without any particular expression.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"I hope so," Jerry said. "I'd like to see someone in charge, please."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No. I don't need a doctor. I just want some information."

The woman looked at the telephone with a severe expression. "Dr. Sanborn is busy now," she said. "He has consultations all morning. Perhaps he could see you later. If you'd leave your name and tell me the nature of the information you want, I'll see that he gets the message."

"Is Dr. Sanborn the owner, or manager, or whatever you call it, of this place?"

"Dr. Sanborn is the senior resident surgeon," the woman said. "Are you from a newspaper?" she asked, rather abruptly.

"No, I'm not. I'm looking for a girl who disappeared. I came here on a hunch. I'm not sure she was ever here, but I've got to try everything."

"Was she a patient here?"

"No, I'm sure of that much, at least."

The woman looked severely at the phone again and then said, "Possibly Dr. Sanborn could see you for a few moments. I can't promise, but I'll try."

She picked up the phone, waited a moment or so, then said, "Dr. Sanborn? This is Miss Walsh. There's a young man here who would like to see you for a few moments. . . . No, it's not professional. He is looking for a girl who disappeared. He thinks possibly you can help him. I don't know why he thinks that, Doctor, but I thought . . . Very well, Doctor."

She replaced the phone, looked at Jerry. "He'll see you. Go through these double doors. His office is the first on the left."

"Thanks a lot," Jerry said.

He went through the double doors, stopped at the first door on the left and knocked.

A deep masculine voice said, "Come in, please."

JERRY turned the knob and walked into a large, well lighted office. Sun came in neat bars through the Venetian blinds, criss-crossing the tan carpeting. A man sat at a desk in the middle of the room, with his back to the window.

He was about fifty, with thick graying hair, a neatly trimmed van dyke beard and confident, strong features. He wore dark clothes that were well tailored. The vest had an edge of white piping which could have looked affected, but didn't. He looked composed, serene and distinguished.

"Are you Dr. Sanborn?" Jerry asked.

"Yes. How can I help you, Mr. . . . .?" He left the last word hanging.

"It's Evans," Jerry said.

Dr. Sanborn acknowledged the name with a slight inclination of his head. He pointed to a chair and said, "Won't you sit down, Mr. Evans," and then he glanced, rather pointedly at his watch.

"I'll be as quick as I can," Jerry said. "My fiancee disappeared six weeks ago. I was still overseas then, and didn't learn of it until I got back. She simply vanished. She left her room as usual on the morning of August sixteenth. But she never got to work. The girl at the train station remembers that she was offered a ride that morning by someone

in a big, black car. That's the only tangible lead I've been able to run down."

Dr. Sanborn leaned back in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together very carefully.

"I sympathize with you, Mr. Evans. I can understand what a tragic blow this is to you. But to be more practical, how do you feel I can be of help?"

"Maybe you can't," Jerry said. "But I'm trying everything. Jean worked for a publicity agency. She was preparing a prospectus for this Medical Center at the time she disappeared."

Dr. Sanborn frowned. "I don't understand that. We don't use press agents, Mr. Evans. There is a matter of ethics involved, as I'm sure you can understand."

"I understand all that," Jerry said. "But Jean was preparing a presentation for you. I know that for a fact. She had something dignified and subtle lined up and hoped to sell you on it. I thought Jean might have been here to see you."

"I'm sorry, but she wasn't," Dr. Sanborn said. "I'm sure I should remember if she had. Do you have any reason to believe she came here?"

"None at all. I don't have any reasons for anything. I'm just looking around, trying not to go completely crazy."

"You have my deepest sympathy," Dr. Sanborn said. His expression was professionaly grave and his voice was like an organ playing at a funeral.

Jerry shrugged and got to his feet. Everywhere it was the same. No clue, no hint, no help at all. Just regrets, condolences and looks of sympathy. Not a thing that would bring Jean back to him.

"Well, thanks, anyway," he said.

HE TURNED toward the door, but before he could take a step, it opened violently. A young woman stumbled into the room. Her eyes were wild and haunted.

She stared blankly at Jerry, then turned to Dr. Sanborn. "You fiend!" she whispered. "You——"

"Mrs. Nettstrum," Dr. Sanborn said sharply. "Please control yourself." He stood up, moved slowly around the desk and walked toward her with deliberate steps. "You're overwrought and excited. You need rest."

The woman slipped her hand into her purse. "Don't come near me!" she said. Her hand came out of the purse holding a short, ornamental knife. "Don't touch me!"

Jerry moved to the woman's side. "Whatever your trouble is, you're not going to straighten it out this way," he said. "Let me have that knife."

She turned on him with hysteric fury. "Get away from me!" She raised the knife over her head. Her eyes were those of a maniac. Wild, tortured, glaring.

Jerry stepped back quickly. She came a step closer to him and now her lips were working loosely, and sounds were coming out that made no sense at all.

Jerry feinted to the left, then stepped in close and caught her wrist. He twisted until the knife fell to the carpet. She looked at him for a moment, and then the hysteria faded from her eyes and she began to sob bitterly.

Dr. Sanborn put his arm around her shoulders.

"There, there," he murmured. "Nothing to be alarmed about. No need for tears, Mrs. Nettstrum. You need a cup of hot tea and a little rest."

A nurse, a heavy, strong-looking woman with steel-gray hair appeared at the open door, and Dr. Sanborn nodded to her. "Miss Smith, take Mrs. Nettstrum into one of the rest rooms. Give her a light sedative. She's a bit upset."

The nurse came into the room and took the woman by the arm. Her grip was firm. "Just come with me, please," she said.

The woman was still sobbing. Jerry noticed that her clothes were expensive, that she was well-groomed and looked as if a lot of time and money were spent on her appearance. She had dark hair, a rather angular face, that would have been attractive, if not pretty, under normal circumstances, but which was now streaked and flushed. The nurse led her from Dr. Sanborn's office, supporting her with a thick, capable-looking arm.

Jerry picked up the knife and handed it to Dr. Sanborn.

"An unfortunate experience," Dr. Sanborn murmured. "Your coolness saved it from being a tragic one. Mrs. Nettstrum is a neurotic woman. Our diagnosis indicated a serious cardiac condition. When we told her she went to pieces, and her neurosis took the form of blaming us for her condition. That is not an unusual reaction. Doctors who have to tell patients bad news often become the object of the patient's deepest hatred, simply because most humans dislike people who tell them things they don't like to hear." He shook his head and then glanced again at his watch.

"I'm sorry to be abrupt, Mr. Evans, but I have an appointment shortly. I regret I can't help you, but let me wish you the best of luck in your search."

"Thanks," Jerry said. "I'll be running along now."

He shook hands with the doctor and left.

OUTSIDE, he went into a restaurant that faced the building he had just left. He got a table in the window where he could watch the entrance and ordered coffee. He was waiting for Mrs. Nettstrum. He didn't know just why, but he felt there was something off-key about Dr. Sanborn.

He waited an hour before she appeared. She came to the curb and looked up and down the street, obviously waiting for a cab. Jerry left a quarter on the table and crossed the street. He came up beside her and tapped her on the arm.

"Could I talk to you a moment?" he asked.

She turned toward him and there was no recognition in her eyes. She looked better now, her make-up was on evenly and she seemed poised and normal. But she couldn't hide her nervousness completely. There was a trace of it evident in the way she wet her lip as she stared at him. One white-gloved hand moved instinctively to her throat.

"What could we have to talk about?" she asked.

"Maybe nothing. But I saw you in Dr. Sanborn's office a while ago. I was the guy who took that knife away from you. That was a pretty dangerous toy. Do you always carry a knife when you have an appointment with your doctor?"

She wet her upper lip nervously. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do. I need help and you may be able to help me. I want to know something about Dr. Sanborn. I don't know what kind of trouble you're in. Sanborn told me a story about your having a bum heart and blaming him for it. That didn't sound very convincing to me."

"He's a liar," she said bitterly. "I wish it were only a bad heart."

"It must be serious trouble," Jerry said. "Won't you give me a line on this guy, Sanborn. I wouldn't bother you like this, but I'm desperate. I haven't any other place to turn."

The woman looked down at the street

and then looked back up at him. She shrugged listlessly and said, "I don't see how it will make things worse. Can we go somewhere and get a drink?"

"Sure."

He led her down the street to a small, dimly lit bar, with booths on one side. They sat in a booth, facing each other, and ordered drinks. Jerry lit a cigarette for her and then waited for her to talk.

She took her time. She stared at the drink when it came and toyed with the ice. Finally she said, "I'd rather cut my tongue out than tell this thing to people I know. But talking to a stranger is easier. I don't know, I'll probably never see you again, so it doesn't matter what you think of me." She sipped her drink slowly and then went on talking. She didn't look at him. She kept her eyes on the table.

"My husband left for the army several years ago. We were deeply in love, but waiting was pretty hard. I'm not trying to condone what happened, but I was lonely, and I had the feeling life was slipping past me while my husband was away."

SHE smiled, a rueful bitter smile and said, "it's not so easy telling this. I met a man while my husband was gone and after seeing him for several months we had an affair. I didn't love him, but I simply couldn't stand being alone any more. I wasn't very smart about it, either. I found I was going to have a child. There was only one thing to do then. That's how I met Dr. Sanborn. The City Medical Center is simply a front for illegal operations. A friend sent me there and Dr. Sanborn performed an abortion. That was just the start. When my husband returned Dr. Sanborn began blackmailing me. I had some money and he got it all. Then he insisted on more. I told him I couldn't get it, that I needed time, but he threatened to send the evidence, complete with photographs to my husband. I think I went a little crazy. I put a knife in my purse and came downtown with the intention of forcing him to destroy the evidence." She put her drink down and looked up at him. "You know the rest. I don't see how in God's name this will help you, but if it does it will be the first good to come out of this horrible, dirty business."

"Have you thought of telling your husband?"

"I couldn't," she said slowly. "I'd rather kill myself. That's the only way I'll ever get away from Dr. Sanborn."

"Don't be foolish. I know it's easy to give advice, and other people's problems always look simpler than our own, but I'd tell your husband the whole story, and regardless of how he takes it, you'll feel better." He put a dollar on the table and got up. "Thanks a lot for talking to me. You've given me an idea. I don't know where it will lead, but I'll find out soon enough. Are you coming along?"

"No, I think I'll have another drink," she said.

Jerry left her and went to his hotel. He called the police department and asked for Lieutenant Simon Anderson.

After a short wait a voice said, "Anderson speaking. Who's this?"

"This is Jerry Evans."

"The guy whose girl is missing? Well we still don't know anything, Evans."

"Well, I've picked up a couple of odds and ends. Jean was picked up by somebody in a big, black car the morning she disappeared. I got that from the girl who sells tickets at the IC station."

"What station is that?"

"Fifty-ninth street," Jerry said.

"We'll work on that. And I'll talk to the men I've had working on this

case. They should have got that lead. Anything else?"

"Yeah. Do you know anything about the City Medical Center?"

"Not much. I understand it's on the level."

"Like hell it is. I just came from there. It's a front for an abortion ring. Now Jean was working on a program for those people. I talked to the guy who runs the place and he says she was never there. But he might be lying."

"We'll work on that angle," Anderson said. "Damn it, I ought to have you on the payroll. Got anything else?"

"No, that's all, but I'll let you know if I do."

"Fine. I'll call you back if I find anything. Thanks, Evans."

Jerry put the phone down and there was a knock at the door.

HE CROSSED the floor, opened the door. Two men stood there. One was tall, heavy-set, with a hard face, and small narrow eyes. His nose had been broken, apparently more than once, and the re-setting job hadn't helped much. It gave his face a twisted look. He had his right hand in his suit coat pocket.

The other man was small, neatly dressed, with thin graying hair and pince-nez glasses. He carried a small, black physician's bag in his left hand.

"Mr. Evans?" he asked.

Jerry had a flashing intuition of danger. He started to slam the door, but he wasn't fast enough. The big man moved quickly, jammed his foot in the door, and jabbed a hard left into his face.

Jerry went back, and before he could get his hands up, the big man was into the room, on top of him, hitting him with both hands. He went down and the big man put a knee in his back and twisted his arms behind him.

The man with the pince-nez came quickly into the room, closing the door after him. He opened his black bag, removed a hypodermic and squatted beside Jerry.

"Hold him carefully now," he said.

Jerry tried to struggle but it was useless. He felt his coat sleeve being pushed up, his shirt being ripped, then he felt the needle going into his forearm.

How long it took the stuff to work he never knew. He felt himself going numb and then a hazy grayness settled over his mind. He didn't black out completely, but he felt helpless and weak.

They picked him up, carried him to the door.

The little man said, "How fortunate you called a doctor when this attack caught you, Mr. Evans." He smiled mildly and then chuckled. "Handle him carefully, John. He's a very sick man."

Jerry felt the grayness getting more solid and heavy. There were flashes of black with the gray now, and pretty soon there was nothing but black.

That was all he knew.

CHAPTER III

HE CAME around in a white-walled, white-ceilinged room, just large enough to accommodate the cot he was lying on, a chest of drawers and a single chair. The furniture was painted white and the linoleum floor was white.

There was a single window, open about six inches at the bottom. The glass was glazed and he could see the heavy shadows of bars against it.

He tried to sit up but he couldn't make it. His head was pounding and there was no strength in his arms and legs. His stomach felt like it had been through a wringer and then packed in ice overnight. He lay there thinking.

He remembered what had happened. The two men who had come to the hotel. The big guy with the broken nose who had hit him. The little guy with the doctor's valise who had given him the shot. He remembered all that. He thought about it a while and it didn't make any sense.

After a few minutes he tried sitting up again. This time he made it. He sat on the edge of the cot and held his head in both hands. If he hadn't it would have rolled off.

His stomach felt squeezed and cold and his head was pounding viciously. He knew he couldn't stand up, any more than he could fly. But he tried anyway. Trying to fly would have been easier.

When his weight hit his knees they buckled and he rolled sideways on the cot and lay there gasping. Now he'd have the job of sitting up to go through again. But he wasn't ready for it yet. He wanted about twelve hours sleep, a cold shower, a steak and about six cups of coffee with brandy before he tried sitting up again.

He was wondering where he'd get the brandy to go with the coffee when the door opened.

Two men came into the room. One was Crooked Nose, the playful giant with the face of a gargoyle and the gentle nature of a man-eating shark.

The other was Dr. Sanborn.

Jerry looked at him for a long time to make sure. His eyes weren't focusing too well, and he could be wrong. He checked over the little beard, the edge of white piping on the black vest, the thick graying hair, the strong, bold features. He apologized his eyes. They were right on the beam. It was Dr. Sanborn, all right.

"Are you feeling better?" Dr. Sanborn asked.

His ears were sharp, too, Jerry decided. It was Sanborn's voice.

"Fine," he mumbled. His own voice sounded vague and ragged.

"Excellent," Dr. Sanborn said. He sat down carefully in the one chair and crossed his legs. With his hands folded in his lap he looked grave, thoughtful and dignified. Crooked Nose stood in the doorway, working on his fingernails with a small knife.

JERRY tried to sit up again. He made it, without the sleep. Without the steak, the coffee and brandy. He felt pretty proud of himself. He had to hang on to the edge of the cot with both hands to keep from falling off, but he was sitting up, facing the doctor.

"What's it all about?" he said. "That's my line, isn't it?"

"Your interest is perfectly normal," Dr. Sanborn said. "A very healthy sign."

"I don't feel healthy. I'd have to get better than this before I'd be able to die."

Talking helped a little. His stomach still ached, his head still throbbed, but he could think now. He could think about Jean. And that brought a lot of strength back. He could probably strike a match now or wriggle his toes. He was a dynamo. Strong as hell.

"You've had a trying time of it," Dr. Sanborn was saying. "However it is a result of your own indiscretion."

"Draw pictures," Jerry said. "I can't follow the big words. You brought me here, gave me a knock-out shot, locked me up in this room. All my fault, eh?" He raised his head enough to look at Dr. Sanborn. "Where's Jean? I know all about you. I know the kind of racket you run. I know you took Jean. You and your big black car. Where is she?"

His voice wouldn't stay in control.

It got high and ragged and he could feel his body trembling.

Dr. Sanborn shook his head slowly and a little smile curved around his lips.

"You are a very sick man, Mr. Evans. Obviously a manic-depressive type. You have been committed by a physician to this institution for a rest. This is a private home for persons suffering from mental aberrations. You will be given the best of care until we decide the final disposition of your case."

"Think again," Jerry said. He tried to make it sound tough. "I'm getting the hell out of here."

"Sorry to disappoint you," Sanborn said. "But we simply can't let you go in your present condition." He leaned back and took a cigarette from a silver case. "You've made a little problem for me, Evans." He snapped a silver lighter and lit his cigarette. "You seem to know a great deal and I can't have that. I have a business which can't stand publicity."

"That's why you got rid of Jean," Jerry said. He hadn't thought of it before, but it seemed logical enough now. "She worked for a publicity agency. You liked that a lot. The way you'd like a hole in your head."

Sanborn stood up, shook his head sorrowfully.

"Mr. Evans, you must rest. Your nerves are in bad shape. I think the best thing for you is sleep. A long, quiet sleep. Yes, I believe that is the prescription." He turned slightly and nodded to Crooked Nose. "Do you agree?"

Crooked Nose stopped cleaning his nails. He looked at Jerry and nodded. "That's seems to be what he needs," he said.

"A pity," Sanborn murmured. "Mr. Evans, if you need anything just call. Albert will be outside in the corridor. There will be someone there all night just in case you get lonely."

He smiled pleasantly and left the room. Albert closed the door after him, and Jerry heard a bolt click.

HE COULDN'T sit up any longer. There wasn't any need to anyway, so he rolled over on his side. Getting his legs up on the cot wasn't easy, but he managed it. Then he turned on his back and lay there, breathing heavily.

He had to get out. But he didn't have a tank, or a hydraulic hammer or even a nail file.

He struggled up to a sitting position. He saw a small hand basin in a corner of the room. He tried to get up. He had no way of knowing how long it took him to get across the room to the basin, but his shirt was plastered to his back with sweat by the time he made it. There was just one tap and when he turned it cold water came out. He made a cup of his hands and drank some. It tasted fine. But his stomach didn't like it.

It came right back up, changed to a nice shade of green. He tried again and the results were the same. But the third time the water stayed down. He drank a little more and then wiped his mouth. He wasn't sure whether it was just imagination, but it seemed to help him a little.

Next, he splashed water over his face, and even managed to pour some on the back of his neck. That gave him the same sensation he would have gotten from a guillotine, but after the shuddering shock wore off, he felt better.

He walked then. From one side of the room to the other. He swung his arms in circles and then slapped his face with both hands, from side to side, the way a flight manager wakes up a punch-drunk battler. He almost

knocked his head off.

He went back to the basin and took the water cure again, and then he walked some more. His knees worked like universal joints, bending at unusual angles. He walked like a rubber-legged drunk. But he walked. After a while he tried to squat. He wasn't very good at that. His legs quit and he hit the floor.

It took him a long while to get up. He walked in circles a little longer, drank more water. He got his face down to the opening at the bottom of the window and tried some fresh air. It was all right. It cleared his head.

He could think again, but he was still weak. The cot looked inviting. He wanted to lay down and sleep. He wanted to pull something over his head and never have another thought in his life.

"Tough guy, aren't you?" he said. He heard his voice and wondered who was talking. "Quit, just when you got it licked. Walk a few more miles, drink some more water, and get some more of that air, you'll be all right. Keep at it."

It was a great pep talk. Like a high school football coach. He laughed and kept walking. Drinking. Walking.

After another half hour he was all right. There was still a dull ache over his eyes, but the dope was wearing off. Strength was back in his arms and legs. He felt he could hit someone and not fall over from the recoil.

He looked for something to hit someone with. The heaviest thing in the room was the chest of drawers, but it wasn't practical. The handle on the water tap, however, was a neat little gadget. Porcelain, shaped like a small bowling pin, about three inches long and three quarters of an inch thick. That inside a fist could do a lot of damage.

There was a screw that secured it to the square pin which it fitted.

He didn't have a knife, a nail file. Both had been taken from him. He knew he didn't have a screw driver. He didn't even have to look.

There was a bare chance that he might break it off. He got a grip with both hands and pulled upward with all his strength. He didn't think he could do it, but the screw snapped suddenly, and the unexpectedness of it almost sent him sprawling.

He tried the porcelain handle for size and it was just about perfect. Inside his fist it wasn't visible, but it would be just as effective as a roll of dimes.

HE WENT back to the cot and stretched out. Then he yelled for Albert. It took a lot of yelling, finally he heard the bolt click. The door opened and Albert stuck his head in the door. The little eyes above the crooked nose looked mean.

"Shut up," he said.

"Like hell I will," Jerry shouted.

Albert came over and sat on the side of the cot. "You're going to keep quiet or I'll put you in a strait jacket and hang you up by your heels. You won't make noise then. The blood gets down in your head and after a half hour you lost interest in talking. Would you like that, chum?" He leaned a little closer.

That was the moment Jerry was waiting for. It was really simple. Albert was sitting on his left. A right hook behind the ear would knock him silly. Then take his keys and gun and clear out.

That was the way his mind saw it. But it didn't work that way.

He swung a right at Albert, but something caught his wrist. It was Albert's hand.

"No," Albert said, without much ex-

pression.

He tightened his grip slowly and Jerry felt his wrist bones grinding together. The porcelain handle slipped from his hand and he bit his lips to keep from yelling.

Albert picked up the broken handle without changing his grip. He looked at it for a moment, then shook his head.

"The doctor won't like the idea of you busting his plumbing. He's funny that way. And I don't like the idea of you taking that swing at me, chum. With this thing in your hand I could of got hurt."

He dropped the handle to the floor and put his other hand on Jerry's wrist. He began to twist slowly.

"This'll teach you to be a good boy," he said.

Jerry fought back a scream as his wrist was twisted behind him. He didn't know why he bothered not yelling. There wasn't any sense in not yelling. There wasn't any sense in anything.

His body turned with his wrist, in a futile effort to relieve the pressure. It turned him against Albert's body and that was as far as he could go. But the wrist kept turning slowly. Jerry hoped it would break soon. Maybe that would be the end of it.

His chest was pressed hard against Albert's side and he felt something hard digging into his ribs. He opened his eyes and saw the butt of a gun. His left hand was under him, but he could move it enough to touch the gun.

He didn't dare for a moment. It looked too easy. There must be a trick to it. The gun was probably red hot, or was wired to an electric battery. Something like that.

Albert applied a bit more pressure.

"Remember this," he said. "When you feel like breaking up the joint, remember what happens. The next time I come in here I'll hang you up in the jacket. You gonna be good now?"

Jerry reached for the gun. He didn't care if it exploded in his hand. He had to try.

The gun slipped out of the holster into the palm of his hand. He curled his forefinger around the trigger and then jammed the muzzle with all his strength into Albert's side.

"Break the arm," he said. "Then I'll blow you into two pieces."

ALBERT grunted when the gun dug into his ribs. He seemed to know what had happened. He held onto Jerry's wrist for another second and then he let go.

"Get up!" Jerry said. "I want to shoot you, so I don't care whether you do or not. But you'll stay alive a few seconds more if you listen to me."

Albert got up slowly and stood still. His hands were clenching and unclenching nervously, but he didn't look as if he were going to argue with the gun.

Jerry got up too. "Turn around," he said.

"What are you goin' to do?"

"Nothing, chum."

Albert turned and Jerry hit him over the top of the head with the butt of the gun. He hit him as hard as he could. He realized it might kill him, but he couldn't work up more than an academic interest in the possibility.

He had to hit him twice. The first time Albert's knees sagged, but he didn't fall. The next time he went down for a long sleep.

Jerry went to the door and looked out. The corridor was bare, unpainted and had a musty, deserted-house smell. It was empty.

He closed the door and then took Albert's belt off and bound it around the man's elbows. He used his own belt as a tether and the chest of drawers as an anchor.

When Albert came to he could get up and walk away, providing he could carry the chest of drawers on his back.

Jerry put the gun in his suit coat pocket, opened the door and went down the corridor. The hall was L-shaped and he was in the short section of the L. When he reached the corner he could look down a long corridor.

There was a man sitting on a chair about twenty yards away reading a newspaper. His back was to Jerry.

Jerry walked toward him as quietly as possible. He took the gun from his pocket and when he got behind the man he put the muzzle against his neck.

"Take it easy," he said.

There was a moment of silence. The man didn't turn, but the newspaper slipped from his hands and floated to the floor.

"Get up and turn around," Jerry said.

The man obeyed slowly. He was small, compactly built, with bushy black hair and rather dull eyes. He wore white trousers, white tennis shoes, and the kind of white smock a dentist wears. The clothes weren't very clean.

"What's the idea, pal?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a girl," Jerry said. "I need a little cooperation. If I don't get it I'm going to kill you and everybody else I meet in this joint. Where is she?"

The man wet his lips nervously. "I don't know anything about a girl, pal you're all steamed up. You need to get some rest. You don't look good, pal."

"Everybody tells me that. Everyone is terribly worried about how I look. About the rest I need. They shoot me full of dope, kick me around and then lock me up. And I don't look good. Why is everyone surprised about that? I'm not in training for the Olympics. I just want my girl. Are you going to talk?"

"Jeez, pal, I don't know what you're talking about. Give me that gun before you get yourself in trouble."

JERRY almost gave it to him. He was too sick and tired to argue. But he didn't. The gun made him boss. That's the way it was in books. You pulled a gun and everyone did what you said. You pointed a gun at a German and he yelled "Kamerad." He remembered all that just in time.

The little man was reaching slowly for the gun, when Jerry realized he was boss. That gave him a little extra strength.

He grabbed the man's outstretched arm with his free hand and swung him around. Then he hit him over the head with the barrel of his gun. This guy wasn't as tough as Albert. He didn't need a second belt. His knees buckled and he went down.

Jerry looked around then. The man's chair had been placed in front of one of the doors that opened on the corridor. That might mean something, but it didn't have to.

He tried the door but it was locked. He bent over the unconscious man and fished through his pockets looking for keys. There was a key ring, with several keys, in the pocket of the man's smock.

Two of the keys didn't fit the lock, but the third did. He pushed the door open and stepped into a darkened room. He saw a figure sit up on a cot against the wall of the room.

"Who is it?" a whisper asked.

Jerry felt his knees turn to water. His hands were suddenly shaking uncontrollably. He went toward the voice, half-stumbling in his eagerness.

"Honey," he whispered.

There was a soft little cry from the girl on the cot and then he was down beside her and he felt her arms about his neck. He pulled her closer to him and buried his face in her hair.

"I knew you'd find me, Jerry." She was half-crying, half-laughing. "I knew it all along. I never stopped waiting for you to come and get me. Oh, darling it's been so long here."

"Did they hurt you, honey? Tell me if they did, please."

"No, they just kept me here. They wouldn't tell me a thing. They kept me locked up, but that's all."

He put his hands on her slim shoulders and looked at her hungrily. In the gloom her hair looked dark, but he could see her narrow piquant face and the shine of her eyes.

"I've found you, honey. I've been almost crazy. But we've got to get out of here yet. Are you able to walk? Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm all right, darling. I could walk a hundred miles with you."

"I don't know how we'll get out. But I've got a gun and Sanborn doesn't know I'm out yet."

"A slight inaccuracy," a voice behind him said.

JERRY wheeled and raised his gun but there was nothing to shoot at. The doorway was empty.

"Let's have that gun, please," Sanborn said. His voice came from the corridor. "You and the girl are very likely to be hurt if you try anything foolish. Toss the gun into the hallway or we will begin shooting. Please don't make me prove that I mean what I say."

Jerry waited for a moment and then he knew they didn't have a chance.

"Sorry, honey," he said. He felt something inside him tearing. He felt like crying.

He threw the gun into the hallway. He saw a hand pick it up, then a shadowy bulk filled the doorway and a light switch clicked. In the sudden illumination Jerry saw Dr. Sanborn standing in the doorway. Albert stood behind him.

"You've caused a lot of trouble," Sanborn said. He came into the room slowly, with Albert behind him. Albert looked sullen and mean.

Jerry put his arm around Jean's shoulder. "What goes now? Are you silly enough to think you can get away with all this?"

Sanborn smiled tiredly. "I don't know whether I can or not. I probably won't, but I've got nothing left to do." His face, Jerry noticed, had lost its usual expression of bold confidence. Now he looked nervous and uncertain. "You see," he went on, "I'm between the devil and the deep. When this young lady came to my office six weeks ago she, unknowingly, put me in an unenviable position. She offered to prepare a publicity program for me. As you can imagine," he continued, with an ironic smile, "that is the last thing in the world my business needed. I attempted to dissuade her, but she finally stated that she was going to give me a month's program, completely free of charge, just to convince me how well it would work. That made it necessary for me to do something. First I had to stop her from providing any publicity for me, which would have been ruinous. That I did by arranging to meet her the next morning and offering to drive her downtown. Instead I brought her here. The immediate problem was solved, but that left me in even a more difficult one." He glanced at Jerry and smiled again, the same tired smile. "Then you came along. You wouldn't have been difficult if you hadn't talked to Mrs. Nettstrum. But you did and that made you a problem also, particularly since you half-suspected then what had happened to this young lady. I am not a very original man. I used the same solution in your case as I did hers. That provides me with an immediate solution, but it

doesn't eliminate the problem. The final solution, I'm afraid, has to be permanent."

Jerry got what he meant. It didn't take much deduction. It was all pretty simple. Curtains for two. It sounded like the start of an unpopular song.

His arm tightened about Jean's shoulder. He looked down at her and tried to smile. He didn't make a very good job of it. She smiled back at him and she did a little better job of it.

"It's all right, Jerry," she said. "This will save you buying me that drink I've been waiting for."

"You waited five years for it," he said. "You should get it after all that time. This is a lousy deal for you."

"I've been drinking too much anyway. Cokes every night. You've no idea what a little heller I turned into since you've been away." Her voice broke a little and then she started to cry. He pulled her closer to him and she buried her face against his arm. He looked up at Sanborn and Albert. "This must make you feel proud," he said evenly. " While a lot of guys were gone, getting themselves killed and shot up to keep things right at home, you rats are making a fine living on it. Getting fat on the trouble girls get into. You're big heroes. You're hot guys."

"There's no need for this castigation, Mr. Evans," Sanborn said. "We aren't exactly pleased with ourselves. But some things must be done. The world is not a perfect place. And the people in it are not perfect."

AS HE finished talking the little man with the bushy black hair appeared in the doorway.

"Doctor," he said, "a car just pulled up in front. It's city coppers. What do we do?"

Dr. Sanborn stood stock still for a moment, his eyes narrowing. He tugged at his beard for a moment and the creases over his eyes seemed to deepen. Finally he squared his shoulders.

"Albert," he said. "See that our guests remain quiet. I'll talk to the officers. I think I can handle them. This section of the house is not likely to be searched."

Jerry said, "The luck is running out, doctor. You haven't got a chance."

"We'll see," Dr. Sanborn said. He walked quickly from the room, the little man with the bushy black hair tagging after him.

Albert said, "You people be good, now. I don't want to have to get rough." He emphasized the last word with a wave of the gun barrel.

Jerry said, "You can't shoot us. Get smart, Albert. That would bring the cops here fast."

"I can work on the girl," Albert said. "Nice and quiet. Nobody will hear a thing. But she won't like it. And maybe you won't like watching it. Think that over."

"Does it ever bother you, being such a heel?" Jerry asked.

"I don't like that kind of talk. Cut it, or I'll feed you some of this gun barrel."

"You're a real tough guy, all right," Jerry said. Don't you ever wake up at night and wonder about yourself? Did you ever kick over a damp rock and see the things that crawl out? Wouldn't that make you think a little?"

"Cut it," Albert snarled. "You're a hot guy, you are. The line you was giving the doctor about the heroes in the army, and what heels we were. That's a laugh. I tried to get in the army. They wouldn't have me. I can't breathe through this nose of mine so they kick me out. What's a nose got to do with being a soldier? Anyway my brother was in it. He was a big hero. What did it get him? A bellyfull of lead at Anzio,

that's what. All that's left of him is this gun he sent me. A souvenir gun!"

"He must have been proud of you. He must have spent hours telling his buddies what a great guy you were. A real hard guy. Beats the hell out of girls, kicks guy around, as long as they can't hit back. I'll bet he was thinking about a great guy you were when they got him."

"Will you shut up?" Albert yelled. "He didn't know anything about me. I sent him dough. He thought I had a regular job. He told the guys in his outfit about me. He wrote me that."

"I'm sure he did," Jean said suddenly. She stood up and walked toward Albert. "He must have been proud of you," she said, in a gentle voice. "But he wouldn't be now, I'm sure. Give me that gun, Albert." She held out one small hand. "You can do this one thing, and it's a pretty big thing, for your brother."

ALBERT looked at her small hand for a moment and then his head turned toward the window. He frowned and began to shake his head slowly.

"I don't know why I got this way. I got off the track somewhere, maybe." He lowered the gun to his side and continued talking, in a desperate, anguished voice. "I don't like it. There's nothing to do when you start but keep going. You get more rotten all the time and you don't think about it anymore. I can't give you the gun, lady. That's all I got left."

Jerry had a chance to go for him then, but he waited. He knew something else was coming.

And it did.

Albert raised the gun and jammed it into his own side. His eyes, hot and wild, met Larry's. "You ain't the only right guy in the world," he yelled.

The explosion was muffled. Albert's face twisted and he began to sag. He opened his mouth twice, but no words came out. He was still trying to talk when he fell forward and crumpled to the floor.

His big frame twitched a minute and then was still. Jerry bent and took the gun from his hand and then he stood and looked down at Albert's dead body.

"He had the makings of a fifty-mission guy," he said slowly. "Maybe it's too bad he never got his chance."

He turned then and took Jean by the arm. They left the room, turned left in the corridor and walked quickly to the intersection.

Six feet from the turn of the corridor they heard footsteps coming fast along the connecting hallway.

Jerry shoved Jean behind him and raised his gun. A man turned the corner with a gun in his hand. There were two more men behind him, guns out.

The man in the lead stopped and the grim look on his face changed to a smile. "Got here in time, eh?"

Jerry felt a sense of relief sweep over him. Lieutenant Anderson came up to him, shoving the gun back into his holster. "We got Sanborn downstairs," he said. "I called your hotel this afternoon, learned you'd been taken away by a 'doctor' so I raided Sanborn's office. I found the address of this joint and got here as fast as I could." He looked at Jean. "And this is the young lady that caused all the trouble, eh?"

"Yes," Jean said meekly.

"Well, what are you going to do to her?" Anderson grinned.

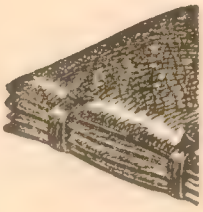
Jerry put his arm around Jean and grinned back. "First I'm going to buy her the drink I owe her. Then I've got a lot of plans which are none of your business, Lieutenant."

"Fine," the Lieutenant said. "Marriage is a great thing, I always say. Every family should have one."

THOSE SLAUGHTERHOUSE BLUES

by Larry Holden

A pulp magazine editor will do anything to keep his writers contented. Anything, of course, except to take murder raps for them!



THE cab driver said proudly, "This is it, Cap—the famous Slaughterhouse district of Newark."

Lee Bohun looked up from his briefcase, through which he had been pawing with the slightly distrait air of a mother hunting diapers. He cocked his eye at the rows of dingy shops and flowering saloons that bordered River Street. He had not been so náive as to expect running knife fights or Tommy-gun battles, but this dreary spectacle of horse-meat butchers and sec-

Like a broad-jumper taking off, Bohun sprang at the men on the stairs

ond-hand clothier's was as dismal as a circus without clowns or calliopes. His quizzical eyebrow regarded it. Again the ferocious tiger had turned out to be a mangy tabby; the fangs of the lion were plastic and manufactured by Dupont; the cobra was a length of garden hose. He grinned.

The cab driver waved his hand. "The Slaughterhouse!" he declaimed.

"The hell it is," said Bohun. "It's Brooklyn!"

"Brooklyn!" The hack driver sneered and spat out the window. "See that joint over there, Cap? The Investors Mortgage Company—raided in broad daylight last week and the gang grabbed off a briefcase holding a hundred thousand bucks in bonds. They was chased clear up to Belleville when their car skid and wrapped itself around a tree. They all got away but one. He ran into the river and got stuck in the mud, so they shot him. He was nuts.

"And over there on the corner is Willie McGovern's saloon, where last Tuesday Jimmy Spiros knocked off his brother-in-law, beat up six other Greeks with the butt end of a meat cleaver, tore the pants off one of the cops that was dragging him out to the wagon, and on the way to headquarters he bit one of the dicks on the knee, kicked another in the wrist and escaped.

"Brooklyn!" the cabbie laughed hollowly. "Listen, Cap, where in Brooklyn can you stand on any given street corner and get your pocket picked six times in five minutes? How many alleys in Brooklyn can you come out the other end of minus everything including your ears?

"No, Cap. This joint right here killed more guys last year than the atom bomb, and maimed more others than a trip through a threshing machine. This is the Slaughter-house!"

"In that event," Bohun zipped shut his briefcase, "you'd better let me out. This will probably be my last chance to wade in blood before going back to Chicago. I'll walk the rest of the way."

"On foot!"

"Barefoot, if necessary."

BOHUN stood on the sidewalk and paid him off, adding a fifty cent piece over the toll. "That's not a tip," he said. "That's the amusement tax. You have a fine narrative style, my friend, and if ever you decide to write, I'd like to see your stories. I'm Lee Bohun, editor of *Gigantic Detective Magazine.*"

The driver grinned and looked sheepish enough to be sheared. "Well," he said defensively, "it *is* a pretty tough neighborhood."

"So my writers tell me. I'm going to visit one now, and he'll probably tell me again. Drop in and see me later. I'll undoubtedly be floating down the river under the bridge about seven-thirty this evening. Drop in any time."

He turned and walked away, a long, running grin lifting the corner of his mouth.

He was a big, loose-walking monolith of a man in a flapping gray suit that was as wrinkled as a contour map. His face was broad and high-boned, set with nimble gray eyes and a wide, humorous, sensitive mouth.

He was spotted by the legless beggar sitting in the toy express wagon in the sun by the corner saloon. The beggar snatched the smoldering cigar from his mouth and handed it over his shoulder to the thin wasted boy of ten who stood behind him.

"Duck the weed, Pooch," he ordered in a rasping voice. "Push me out more on the sidewalk."

The boy had the sad, sly face of an old, old man. He put the cigar on the basement window ledge and pushed the express wagon a few feet farther into the sun. It took all his skinny strength to move it.

As Bohun crossed the street, the beggar rattled three pencils in a water glass and whined, "Pencil, mister? Pencil?" He held out a broken-visored cap with the other hand.

Bohun's eyes darkened with quick compassion, and he dug in his pocket and threw a loose handful of change into the offered cap.

"Maybe you can do something for me." His voice was deep, rumbling, pleasant—distant thunder in July. He took an index card from his pocket and read from it. "I'm looking for Tigue Street."

The beggar eagerly pursued the coins in the lining of the cap. He had hands like tree roots, arms like trunks. With legs, he'd have been a colossus. "Thanks for the coins, mister," he said with hoarse gratitude. "Tigue Street? This is it, mister. This is it for a fact. Ain't it, Pooch. Pooch'll tell you."

Pooch had nothing to say. He had his back to them, crouched over the cigar, drawing avid mouthfuls of smoke.

The beggar's voice whined on. "Used to have street signs, but the damn kids was always stealing them to sell them for junk. Maybe," there was a sharp, speculative glitter in his eye, "maybe there's somebody you're looking for in particular? I know everybody in the Slaughterhouse. Sure, and everybody knows Benjy. Just ask them, mister. Everybody, they got a good word for Benjy. Who was it you was looking for?"

His smooth, egg-shaped face suddenly reminded Bohun of the cynical servility of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*. His eyes had the same watchful glint, larded over with engaging frankness, friendly interest.

Bohun said casually, "Just a friend."

Benjy dropped the coins into the pocket of his blue denim shirt and said, just as casually, "You don't sound like around here, mister. Where you from?"

Bohun glanced around, then leaned over and said in a low voice, "Cicero, pal, Cicero," and strode away, chuckling quietly to himself, a man who had just found a new and vastly entertaining pasttime.

Benjy said sharply, "Pooch!" The boy took a last, quick draw at the cigar and handed it back to the beggar. Benjy grabbed his thin arm and pulling him close, whispered fiercely in the boy's ear. He held out a dime on the flat of his hand. Pooch snatched it and ducked around the corner into the saloon. The beggar screwed the cigar into the center of his mouth and his fingers kept gently turning it as he watched the big man's leisurely passage down the street.

BOHUN was still chuckling as he mounted the steps to 33 Tigue Street. He stopped in the vestibule and consulted the index card again, then glanced up at the row of doorbells. They were neither decorative nor useful. Some were rusted, some showed only the brass contact, and one dangled from the wall at the end of a length of wire, like the viscera of a partially disembowelled fowl. There were no names on any of them, as if the inmates of that dingy house wished to remain forever anonymous.

The card said—Jerry Cahill, Apartment 3-C, 33 Tigue Street, Newark, New Jersey. Also on the card was a typed list of story titles written by Cahill for *Gigantic*.

The outer door hung from a broken hinge, so Bohun walked in. The stair-

way gave soggily under his weight as he mounted to the third floor. He put his hand on the bannister, but drew it away quickly with a grimace. It was as cold and damp as a mildewed coffin.

The door of 3-C was also invitingly open. Bohun knocked and waited with an anticipatory grin on his face. He had been visiting writers all week and many, like Cahill, had not had a phone to herald his coming, and their facial expressions when he announced, "I'm Lee Bohun of *Gigantic*," had ranged from simple surprise to knowing disbelief. One had even denounced him vehemently as the prank of an uninspired jokster known almost anonymously as Smith. It had taken Bohun five minutes to convince him, and he had finally thundered, "Damn it, man, do I have to take off my pants and exhibit my machine gun scars to prove I'm from Chicago?" Unaccountably, that had settled it, and the transformed cynic frisked around him and had tried to ply him with more gin than was hygienic, seemingly under the illusion that the best thing to do with an editor is get him drunk as rapidly as possible.

And probably, Bohun decided chuckling, not a bad idea at that.

The door to 3-C still hung open, and nobody had come to open it wider, nor was anybody coming. Bohun knocked again, and when there was still no answer, he sensibly entered the room. After all, he *had* come over a thousand miles to talk to Jerry Cahill—and by God, he was going to talk to him. Business was business, and he wanted Cahill's name on a contract.

IT WAS a dirty room, a slovenly room, a room that had been worn out, tired out, and no longer cared what appearance it presented. The wallpaper was faded and torn, the rug was threadbare. Standing under the grimy window was an old brass bed, tumbled with sheets and blankets, and beside this stood a green-painted kitchen chair. A chest of drawers, with two drawers missing, stood at the foot of the bed. The only other article of furniture was a low lounge chair that looked as if it had been upholstered with a battle-scarred pennant of William the Conqueror. A finger-marked door on the opposite wall had the secretive air of leading to the toilet.

And over the bed hung the room's only ornament, an oblong sheet of paper held up by two thumbtacks.

WANTED

ABRAHAM MCKINLEY

Not, thought Bohun, a desirable citizen, for among Abraham McKinley's moral lapses were assault with a deadly weapon, robbery and car theft. The picture showed a man with thin, anemic eyes ("gray"), a long sharp nose and heavy, crunching jaws. No, not a desirable citizen at all, but Bohun looked at him with interest. McKinley would probably show up in the next story Cahill wrote of the Slaughterhouse.

There was no typewriter in the room, and Bohun missed that, for writers usually surrounded themselves with the spades and trowels of their craft—typewriters, paper, the bound works of competitors for inspiration.

This room held none of that. The only reading matter, in fact, was the notice over the bed.

Bohun went back to the door, looked up at the 3-C again, consulted his index card and shrugged. Perhaps—he glanced at the secretive door—Jerry Cahill had another place for productive meditation. It was not inconceivable. Writers were among the world's most-accomplished screwballs.

He lowered himself into the William the Conqueror chair, lit a cigarette, crossed his knees and closed his eyes. He was tired and it showed in the slope of his shoulders and in the puttied flesh beneath his eyes. His chin sagged against his chest and the fingers holding the cigarette relaxed. The cigarette fell on the floor beyond the edge of the rug and smoldered there. Bohun dozed.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS the closing of the window that awakened him. His eyes opened unwillingly and for a few minutes he could not comprehend the strangeness of the room. The day had wasted into twilight and the window gleamed bluely beside the bed. In the room beyond the secretive door, someone breathed stentorously, something dragged on the bare boards of the floor. Bohun was still but half awake, and when final consciousness did move him, he was not certain he had heard anything after all, for the sounds had ceased.

He stood and called, "Is that you, Cahill?"

There was no answer in the pulsing beat of the traffic sounds from River Street below. Bohun strode over to the door, and after listening for a few moments, he said again:

"Is that you, Cahill?"

His hand dropped to the knob, but the door was locked. Bohun rattled the knob, then turned away, muttering, "Could have sworn . . ." He looked at the darkening window, then quickly at his wrist watch. He exploded, "Damn!" It was close to seven. He had been there three hours.

He was turning to pick up his briefcase from the floor beside the chair, when the hall door burst open and a man plunged two steps into the room. At the sight of Bohun towering over the chair, he stopped so abruptly his foot slid on the rug. Something dangled limply from his right hand, and with a quick, disguising motion, he thrust it into his pocket—but not before Bohun had spotted it as a blackjack.

He was a small man, cheaply and shabbily dressed, with a pointed face that was as feral as a mink. His lips shrank back from his teeth. It might have been a grin. His eyes were brightly intent on Bohun's face.

Bohun said, "You're not Jerry Cahill, are you?"

The man backed slowly, with small, careful steps, to the doorway, reaching behind him for the doorknob. He seemed on the verge of answering, then changed his mind.

"Maybe you can tell me where I can find Cahill," Bohun said. "I've come from Chicago to see him. I don't want to miss him if there's any chance of seeing him."

The man stopped for an instant at the threshold and his eyes flickered over Bohun, malevolent and slitted, hot with promised violence. His breath hissed between his teeth, and he turned quickly and darted into the hall, slamming the door as he went. Bohun could hear his small feet whisper on the stairway. He went to the door, opened it and stared down the stairwell, but only the sound of the closing street door floated up to him.

He gave a puzzled, rueful laugh and said, "For God sake!" He reached up and turned on the electric light that dangled from the center of the ceiling by a single cord. He sat on the arm of the chair, and using the briefcase for a desk, scribbled a note to Cahill.

Dear Cahill:

Came to call on you this afternoon, but did not find you in. Sorry I couldn't have

let you know I was coming. Unfortunately, I have to leave now, but give me a ring at my hotel. I'm staying at the William Penn.

Cordially,
Lee Bohun
(Gigantic)

He propped it carefuly on the seat of the chair where it wouldn't be missed, reached up and turned out the light and left the room.

A SINGLE amber bulb burned dimly over the second floor landing, shedding about as much light as the yolk of an egg. The hall below lay in pulpy darkness, and Bohun cautiously descended the stairs. He lit a match and held it over his head and suddenly there below him, their faces two patches of white, were two men frozen in the act of stealing up the stairs toward him. One of them was the small, shabby man who had burst into Cahill's room a few minutes before, and behind him was a taller, bulkier man, wearing a plaid cap with a visor that had been broken to form a V over his bony eyebrows. The little man dangled the blackjack from his wrist, and the other man had his right hand sunk deep into the pocket of his jacket.

The little man snarled in a thin, ice-hard voice, "Okay, buddy, you can hand it over now." And he sprang two steps up the stairs and his hand licked out at the briefcase under Bohun's arm.

Bohun dropped the match and leaped backward up the stairs. As the other two lunged after him, he lashed out with his foot and caught the little man flush on the chest. The man gasped and fell heavily against his companion. As they floundered, clutching one another to hold their balance, Bohun jumped down at them, swinging his arm. They disappeared into the darkness of the lower hall, the house reverberating with the thunder of their fall. Bohun's heel slipped on the step. He grabbed wildly for the bannister, then fell sideways into the wall, crashing down on them.

For a few moments they thrashed on the floor, an incoherent tangle of arms and legs and straining bodies, then Bohun felt his hand slide across the smoother fascade of a face. He braced himself on his left elbow and clubbed down with his right fist. Someone groaned.

There was a frantic scratching, scurrying sound, and the front door swung open. For an instant Bohun could see the silhouette of the little man, and then it disappeared and the door closed. The other man lay still on the floor. Bohun raised himself to his knees and lit another match. His briefcase lay on the bottom step. He snatched it up, jumped over the unconscious man and ran to the front door. He leaped out to the sidewalk just in time to see the little man scamper around the corner at the River Street end of the block. Bohun went after him with a heavy, plunging stride. He was panting when he reached the corner by the saloon. He gave the street a quick, inclusive glance, then turned and lunged into the saloon.

Six or seven men were standing at the bar, conspicuously—almost self-consciously—drinking beer. The barkeep, a fat man with a straining vest and a pendant moustache, was busily wiping the bar in front of nobody with a cloth that looked as if it had been regurgitated by a goat.

Bohun demanded loudly, "Where's that man that just came in here? The little man?" But even as he asked the question, he knew he was wasting his time.

The barkeep leaned a little more

heavily on his rag. "A man?" he said carefully, "A little man?"

"Yes, a little man!"

The barkeep turned to the dirty-necked beer drinker nearest him and asked in the same studiously careful voice, "Did you see a little man come in here?"

There was quiet for a moment, then out of this silence the startling squeak, "How little?"

Bohun's eyes swept them ironically, and he held out his hand about two feet from the floor. "Oh, I'd say about that little. His face runs all around his head instead of just in front, but he has only one leg in the middle to make up for it. I'm supposed to be haunting him."

The barkeep pumped at the bar with his cloth. "I'll tell him you was asking for him," he said stolidly. "If I see him," he added. He looked like a man who had seen everything and didn't think much of it.

Bohun said "Thanks!" and strode out slamming the door as if he wanted to take it with him.

BENJY, in his express wagon, was watching him from the corner. Behind him stood Pooch. Pooch was also watching. They were both perfectly still with that tense immobility that preludes menace or violence.

Bohun's face was red and he cried recklessly, pointing at Benjy. "You must have seen him. Where'd he go?"

Only Benjy's mouth moved.

"Where'd who go?" he asked hoarsely.

"That little man who just ran up the street Who was he? Where'd he go?"

"Oh, him. They mostly call him Smith or something. He went that way." He jerked his thumb backward over his shoulder, indicating the lightless stretch of Tigue street. "He came out the side door. He went into the second house on this side. He lives there. Did you wanna see him about something, mister?"

Bohun strode past the express wagon. "Are you kidding?" he said grimly. His jaw was thrust out like a fist and two heavy lines seared his face from his nose to the corners of his mouth.

"Second house down," Benjy called after him.

Pooch giggled, and Bohun plunged on for three strides before it caught him, and then it stopped him more effectively than a pointed gun could have done. It wasn't the giggle of a small boy, thoughtless, innocent, childish. There was obscenity in it, something sly and gloating.

Bohun looked sharply at the second house down. It was a crumbling, two-story frame dwelling, smothered in angular shadow. No light showed from any of the windows, and from outward indications it was uninhabited, condemned by the building inspectors, a fire trap, a . . . Just a plain trap.

Bohun shook his head and said softly, "No. Not this time, and not by the nose."

He turned. Pooch's eyes were bright and intent, and Benjy's smooth, bland face peered expressionlessly at him across the beggar's shoulder. He walked back slowly and stopped beside the express wagon.

"He came out of the side door?" he demanded.

"For a fact, mister. That door right over there."

"That comes from the saloon, doesn't it?"

"Yeah. The fambly entrance."

"In the saloon," Bohun accused him, "they said no one answering that description had come in. How do you figure that one out?"

BENJY looked at the bright window of the saloon and gave a short, rasping laugh. "That's Fat Ben for you." He turned his head and spat accurately into the gutter. "He don't say nothing about nothing to nobody never, nohow. That's the way they are down here—bull happy."

"But *you* told me, didn't you?"

Benjy sneered. "You ain't no cop, mister. In spite of them feet, you ain't no cop."

Bohun looked straight into his face and said very quietly, "What reason did you have for wanting me to go into that house? You wouldn't happen to get a percentage of anything they managed to take from me, would you?"

Benjy met his eyes without wavering. "Listen, mister," he said drily, "I make more in a week sitting here on the corner with my cap out than any cheap gunnie can pull down in a month. And I make it without getting cop-fever, what's more. The guy you're asking about came out of that door and went into that house. Take it or leave it. It's no skin off my belly."

He blew the ash from his cigar, put it back in his mouth and looked disinterestedly up the lighted street.

As Bohun hesitated, Pooch said eagerly, "I'll show you where he lives, mister. I know the exact door. I'll take you for a nickel, mister. What do you say?" He giggled again.

"I say," Bohun grinned mirthlessly, "if you took me, Pooch, it'd be for a hell of a lot more than a nickel. But thanks for the tip-off."

He turned into River Street and walked away from them.

Benjy swung around savagely on Pooch. He lifted his arm and lashed the boy across the cheek with the flat of his gnarled hand. "For a nickel!" he snarled. "I'll nickel you, you yapping pup!"

The blow knocked the boy against the side of the building, and he crouched there, protectively holding his folded arms around his head. He whimpered.

As Bohun strode along, his grim mood lightened, and within a block he was chuckling again. That was his weakness, he thought, that sense of humor. Everything had a farcical side to it. With a twist of his mind, he had turned his two assailants into clumsy comics, and Benjy into a ludicrous gargoyle. If he had been a law-abiding citizen, now, he would have gone straight to the police with a description of the two men, and within due time an arrest would have taken place. But the picture of himself, descending on the police with civickly virtuous war cries, made him chuckle again.

A White Tower hamburger palace spilled a path of electric light and tantalizing odors across the sidewalk, and Bohun was reminded that if he were going to eat at all, it would have to be something at which he could snap and run. He had another call to make that evening. He took a package of index cards, held together with an elastic band, from his pocket and riffled through them until he came to the one that said—A. C. Randolph, 18 Sagamore Place, Arlington, New Jersey. A. R. Randolph, like Jerry Cahill, had no telephone. Randolph was also a writer. Not as good as Cahill, although their styles were very similar. Cahill's stories of the Slaughter-house were matchless for sheer virility and ferocity. He should like to have talked with Cahill.

He sat at the counter and ordered three hamburgers, with pickle and onion, a cup of coffee and an unbelievable piece of pie—a fantastic edifice of crust, custard, bananas, whipped cream and crushed nuts, something he could digest with the slow majesty of a Greenland glacier.

Across the street, standing on the corner as if they were waiting for a bus, was a small knife-faced man with a hasty strip of plaster across his swollen cheek, and a taller, bulkier one in a plaid cap that hid a similar strip of adhesive tape across his forehead. With narrowed, unwavering eyes, they watched Bohun slowly chew his way through the hamburgers and the pie, and when he came out to get the bus at the corner, they slouched over to a black Chevrolet coupe parked at the curb. They made a U-turn and leisurely followed the bus. Why should they hurry when the rabbit wouldn't run?

CHAPTER III

THE lobby of the Hotel William Penn was the management's symbol of modern hospitality, streamlined and polished, gleaming with plastic, chrome and glass. The carpeting was thin but tough, a shallow pattern of chartreuse and Nile green jungle flowers. It was as homey as an igloo.

Before going to his room, Bohun went to the desk, an efficient semi-circle without a superfluous curve or angle to mar the smooth surface. The clerk resembled it closely, even to the plastic gardenia in his buttonhole.

Bohun handed him Randolph's index card and asked, "How would I get to that place from here?"

"Are you driving, sir, or do you wish to take the bus?"

"The bus."

"Certainly, sir. Just a moment."

As he bent over to take the Arlington Street guide from under the desk, his hair looked curiously like a tight-fitting cap, molded in rippling tar. He leafed through the book and wrote the Number 39 on a pad at his right hand. He tore the sheet off and gave it to Bohun.

"You take the Number 39 bus anywhere on Broad Street. Busses run every twenty minutes."

Bohun said, "Thanks."

"Not at all, sir. A Hotel William Penn service." The smile came and went.

Bohun turned away feeling as if he had been embalmed in production-line courtesy.

The elevators were screened from the lobby by a panel of Vita-glass and an angular plastic palm. To the right was the restaurant, from which the orchestra could be heard playing a reminiscent medley of *You're the Cream in My Coffee, Life Is Just A Bowl of Cherries, Tea For Two,* and other hors d'oeuvres calculated to stimulate the appetite.

The elevator was open and waiting, and Bohun walked in humming without knowing he was humming. They had played *Tea For Two* at his first frat dance in high school, and he was a sentimental man.

Too sentimental, in fact, to notice the heavy-set man who slouched into the elevator after him. He was trying to think of the name of a small blonde girl in organdy who had pressed herself hotly against him in the corridor behind the high school gymnasium after he had tilted her face for his first awkward, unpracticed kiss. The heavy-set man slid into the corner behind him. He leaned against Bohun and probed his back under the curve of his ribs with something thrust forward in his pocket.

"That, friend," he whispered, "is a gun."

INSTINCTIVELY, Bohun grasped his briefcase tightly with both hands as the man's left hand stole around his side and felt for it. He glanced quickly over his shoulder, but it didn't need more than a glance to tell him who was behind him. It was the bulky man he

had knocked out in the dim hallway back in 33 Tigue Street. The plaid cap was missing but he couldn't mistake those heavy, sloping shoulders, nor those bony ridges over his eyes, thickened with scar tissue. The man's eyes had been closed when last he had seen them, but they were flat, gray, opaque, almost hidden behind the flesh that had been pushed up from the cheekbones. Thin slits of eyes, pug's eyes. Not the eyes of a man who had to lash himself into a fury before he shot. Bohun felt the skin on his face tighten with apprehension.

The man said softly, "Okay, friend, play it anyway you want." Then sharply to the elevator operator, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

The operator stuck his head out of the car and said, "Party coming."

A moment later, three women in evening gowns, holding their capes at their breasts with their right hands, followed by three men in dinner jackets, strolled into the elevator, talking in clear, shrill, cruel voices.

One of them said with a brittle laugh, "Oh, Cosmo's all right, you know, as long as you remember he's the Johnny Appleseed of the bedroom."

Another answered, "I don't *mind* him, and I don't mind his throwing parties, but if only he wouldn't throw them *at* you. You know?"

Just the talk of people holding boredom at bay with bared fangs.

The operator closed the doors and intoned, "Floors, please."

The woman said, "Top."

The gunman behind Bohun shoved the gun deep into his back, and growled, "Fourth." That was the floor where Bohun had his room.

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor and the operator swung the door open. Bohun sprang for it, then ducked to the right, leaving his leg extended before the doorway. With an exclamation, the gunman leaped after him. He sprawled over the leg, and Bohun kicked viciously to clear him from the elevator. He reached quickly for the door lever and pulled, shutting the gunman out.

"Take it up," he snarled, "Take it up, damn you! Get it out of here!"

THE surprised operator fumbled with the control and the car shot up. There had been nothing about things like this in the Hotel William Penn manual, except that the guest was always right.

One of the women gave a muffled scream and one of the men said angrily, "What's going on here?"

Bohun turned to them. "That man had a gun in my back," he said seriously. "He was trying to rob me. He and another man tried to hold me up in the Slaughterhouse district a short time ago, but I got away from them. He must have followed me here." He grinned. "Persistent, isn't he?"

The women stared at him, but the men looked at one another. The operator opened the doors at the top floor and said in a low voice, "Top," as if he didn't want them to hear. He was listening. This was something that would top the best the bellboys had—them and their lousy blondes. But he was destined to hear no more."

One of the men took Bohun's elbow in his cupped hand and led him from the elevator.

He said, "I happen to be in the district attorney's office and this interests me very much." The others gathered around them and looked curiously at Bohun. They, and the elevator operator, who hung out of his car like a monkey swinging from a trapeze.

The DAO man turned and snapped, "All right, all right this isn't a public

hearing. Get out of here." He hadn't relaxed his hold on Bohun's elbow and as soon as the elevator operator disappeared, he said, "I want to talk to you."

Bohun felt his temper crackle, and before he could check himself, he said, "I don't want to talk to anybody, damn it! I would have gone to the police if I'd wanted to talk. I haven't time to talk. I'm leaving for Chicago in the morning, and I have business to take care of." The editor rose in arms within him and he corrected, "Business of which to take care." He glared at the man grasping his elbow. He jerked himself loose.

One of the women said quietly, "Don't bully him, Charles. I don't think you'll have much luck. Anyway, the man's in trouble."

"I'll give him trouble!" the DAO man snapped. He swung on Bohun, "Well, what's this all about?"

Bohun said truculently, "I told you, and that's all I'm saying. What do you want me to do, produce affidavits?"

"How would you like to go down and have a nice long talk with the district attorney? *He* doesn't give a damn how long he stays up nights. And he's mighty interested in the Slaughter-house these days. How would you like that?"

"I wouldn't like it at all. And what's more, I won't have to like it. And how do you like *that*? I told you I had business to take care of, and I told you I have to go back to Chicago in the morning. So unless you have a warrant, I'm leaving."

The man said menacingly, "Maybe I don't need a warrant."

Bohun stepped back from him and eyed the group standing before him. He shifted his briefcase to his left hand and balanced himself on the balls of his feet, his knees flexed.

"All right," he said. "So you don't need a warrant!"

The woman said, "Charles! Do I have to swear like a trooper before you'll listen to me? Tell this man what you want of him without behaving like a papier mache Hitler and perhaps you'll get some co-operation."

The man snapped, "Shut up! I'll get co-operation."

"On the end of the jaw?" asked Bohun. "Dammit, this is silly. Put up or shut up. I'm going to my room."

THE DAO man looked around quickly at the other two men, but they showed a bored disinclination to transforming themselves into sturdy champions of the law.

The woman stepped forward and put her hand on Bohun forearm.

"You're in real trouble, aren't you?" she asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know what it's all about." Bohun grinned at her. "Unless they're after the twenty-five dollars I have in my wallet, I don't see any reason for their following me all over Newark and environs."

The woman turned to the DAO man and asked, "Is *that* what you want?"

The man said sullenly, "You know very well what I want."

"You can see this man doesn't have it, can't you?"

"I'm not so sure of that."

The woman looked at Bohun. "What's your business?" she asked, but the tone of her voice held no offense.

Bohun said, "I'm the editor of *Gigantic Detective Magazine,* a Ziff-Davis Publication, a hundred and fifty thousand circulation monthly. I've been visiting writers for the last week for business reasons. I don't want any trouble. I'm tired. But, by God, I've never dodged trouble in my life and," glaring at the DAO man, "I'm not starting now."

The woman tightened her fingers on

his arm and said softly, "No one is doubting your courage, Mr.—?"

"Bohun."

"Mr. Bohun. A southern family?"

"Kentucky."

She put her arm through his and turned him down the hall. "Join us for a moment, Mr. Bohun. We won't keep you. Bohun. Could that be a branch of the Boone family? Daniel Boone?"

Bohun said stiffly, "My brother, ma'am." But he grinned again.

The others followed closely behind.

The DAO man said worriedly, "This is the most important case I've had, and there she is . . ."

The woman said, "Oh, hush!" Then to Bohun in her sweetest voice, "Are you armed, Mr. Bohun?"

Bohun was startled, "Armed?"

"That's right. Do you have a gun?"

"Good God, no!"

"You'll probably need one. Charles," she turned, "do you have your revolver with you?"

"No, I don't. And even if I did—"

"Cosmo will have one. Cosmo," she smiled up at Bohun, "has everything." She reached out and pushed the buzzer beside the door. "Even if you don't find this exciting, Mr. Bohun, of the Kentucky Boones, I do!"

Her thigh was pressed against Bohun's and her arm pulled his against her breast. Her eyes were very, very bright, her lips parted.

THE door opened and a short, plump, pink man in a midnight blue velvet dinner jacket gambolled out into the hall, cradling a bottle of champagne in his right arm.

"You nice people!" he burbled, "coming to my unspeakable party . . ."

The woman said, "Shut up, Cosmo. Do you have a gun?"

"A wha-wha-wha . . ."

'A gun, Cosmo. You've often boasted you have everything, so do you have a gun?"

"How big?" asked Cosmo grandly.

Bohun protested, "Really, I—"

The woman ignored him and held up her hands about eight inches apart. "That big, Cosmo."

"I certainly do, darling. But remember," Cosmo held up his finger, "it's not for boudoir use."

He skipped back into the suite and the DAO man said heavily, "I don't approve of this. I want to go on record as not approving of this."

The woman said sweetly, "For the love of God, shut the hell up, Charles."

Cosmo skipped back into view again, holding a heavy gleaming gun by the trigger guard between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He went on his knees before the woman and extended the gun on the palms of his hands.

"The only way," he sighed, "of putting me out of my erotic misery."

The woman took the gun and said, "How *right* you are!" She tilted it to the light. "Take this, Charles. Serial number, 106,239." Charles hurriedly scribbled it on the back of a card with his fountain pen. The woman extended her hand to Bohun, "Your identification please." With a grin, Bohun gave it to her and she read, "Lee Fawkes Bohun, 185 North Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Do you have that, Charles?"

Charles grunted and screwed the cap back on his fountain pen. The woman gave the identification card back to Bohun, and, with the other hand, the gun.

She said, "Thank you, Mr. Bohun. You've been very patient with us, and we've been very, very snotty indeed. I hope you'll forgive us."

Bohun dropped the gun into the side pocket of his jacket and smiled down on

her. "When you come to Chicago—" he said.

"Which will be next month," she answered briskly, "Celebrating the breaking of my engagement to a rising young member of the bar," her eyes darted at Charles. "I would be very pleased, Mr. Bohun, if you would take me around the Loop. The Loop-de-Loop, in fact. If you require any recommendations, Mr. Bohun, as we so inhospitably demanded of you, I can only say I am young, fairly attractive, romantic under certain circumstances, reasonably faithful, and have a conscience adapted to whatever circumstance may arise. Is that sufficient, sir?"

The man called Charles protested angrily, "That's unfair, Margaret!"

She didn't turn, but she said serenely, "I'll file a writ, Charles, in answer. I can reach you at 185 North Wabash Avenue can I not, Mr. Bohun?"

"Any time during the day," he grinned, "And most of the times during the night. I'm a working man, myself."

She lifted her face and said, "Kiss me good-bye."

He gathered her in his arms and his lips spread over hers. When he released her, her hands slid reluctantly from his arms.

Cosmos clapped his hands and pranced around them. "Love in bloom," he trilled, "and when you are finished, Brother Bohun, give her to me and I will pluck it, tenderly, gently, reverently—as usual."

Charles said gruffly, "We'll see you to your room, Mr. Bohun." He turned to the other two men and added savagely, "Won't we?"

The woman lifted her hands to her hair and led back a vagrant strand. "Next month, Bohun. The Loop-de-Loop!"

He waved his hand and said, "See you then."

THE three men glumly climbed down the five flights to his room on the fourth floor and did not leave him until Charles was certain there was no one waiting in his room.

At the door, Charles said heavily, "Don't pay any attention to her. She was mad at me."

Bohun said, as if in surprise, "She didn't sound mad." The man's anguish was salve on his anger.

"She . . . she . . . she's impulsive," Charles stammered, keeping an eye on the other two men, wishing they weren't there.

Bohun touched his lips, rubbing it in. "She certainly is that," he said. "Was there anything else you wanted?"

Charles said savagely, "No. Damn you. No!" He turned and stamped away from the door. The other two followed him, smiling at one another.

Bohun closed the door. Not until he turned on the light and withdrew his hand was he surprised to find his hand was trembling. His eyebrows contracted and he held his hand out before him. The tremor was faint, but unmistakable.

His laugh had a puzzled overtone. Fright? Fear? He certainly didn't feel frightened. He opened his bag, took out an almost empty bottle of bourbon and poured three fingers into the small glass that stood on the night table beside his bed. He gulped it eagerly and waited until the warmth spread into his chest from his stomach. Frightened! Of course he wasn't frightened. The trembling of his hand was just muscular reaction, the most natural thing in the world. Something that would happen to anybody.

Then, suddenly, he found himself looking at the revolver in his hand without quite knowing how it had gotten into his hand, staring at it with a fascination firearms has never held for him be-

fore. He had never actually handled a gun before this. He had seen pictures of them, of course, he had read about them, and he knew what they did. But this was different, this gun he held. It was more personal, more intimate, and it was warm against the palm of his hand. It was a heavy gun—over two pounds—and holding it to the light, he could read Colt Cal. .45 stamped on the left side of the barrel.

A .45! That was magical! In *Gigantic* he had read about .45's. A gun, according to *Gigantic,* to be feared, and now he held one in his hand. He looked at it with a kind of awe. He had never held such a gun before in his life. He pulled back the latch, tipped the cylinder to the left and spilled out the six cartridges in the palm of his left hand. With a flip of his wrist, he snapped the cylinder back into place. He stood up, and holding his arm straight out before him, sighted into the mirror and pulled the trigger.

The mirror looked back at him, and with a start he realized it was his own face. It was a smaller face, eyebrows drawn down, mouth pursed up and rigid. He stared at it with amazement for a moment, then slowly dropped his right eyelid in a broad wink, pulled the trigger again and said loudly, "Bang! Bang!"

He looked at the gun and laughed. Melodrama! Just a prop from a noisy page of *Gigantic!* He slipped the cartridges back into the cylinder and threw the gun on the bed. He laughed again and reached for his bag.

In fifteen minutes he had washed, shaved and changed his shirt and suit. It was late, almost too late, and he had half a mind to skip the interview with A. R. Randolph. He was tired and he had to take the early train to Chicago in the morning, and the bed looked as inviting as the arms of an uninhibited blonde. The hell with A. R. Randolph. He grimaced and reached for the knot of his tie. *Gigantic* wouldn't rise or set on A. R. Randolph.

But his eyes fell on the gun on the bed and he stopped, aghast. He wasn't really that tired, and even if he had been, he ordinarily wouldn't have thought it an adequate excuse. What about the time he had worked through thirty-four steady hours on a dead-line and came up with a cup of coffee in his hand and a wise-crack on his lips. Tired! It wasn't that at all. It was the slope-shouldered gunman. His reluctance to leave the hotel, the warm womb of the bed, the safety of the locked door, had nothing to do with physical weariness. His mouth spread in a thin grimace of self-disgust.

"Old man Bohun!" he growled. "Old man chrome yellow Bohun. Shift your shanks, bud, shift your shanks!"

He snatched up his topcoat and started for the door. He halted with his hand on the doorknob, then, shamefaced, turned and went back and took the gun from the bed.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER leaving the bus at the corner, he had no difficulty finding 18 Sagamore Place. It was next to the last house on the right hand side of the street, and the number 18 was painted in white in a black square on the outside of the curb.

The house was half way down the steep hill and overlooked the oily, sluggish flow of the Passaic River and the scattered lights of Belleville on the west bank. Surrounded by aging trees, the house was set back about a hundred feet from the sidewalk, and raised the clumsy silhouette of its Victorian bulk against the sky, like a dinosaur disputing extinction. Atop the house was

the arabesque of an elaborate widow's walk.

Bohun turned into the graveled path, his heels crunching into the stones. Somewhere in the trees, a small owl called out in soft contralto, then again, but farther away against the massed chorus of soprano peepers. Overhead, the giant limbs of the trees moved in slow rhythm, and the leaves whispered among themselves. In counterpoint, a tugboat hooted like a tuba on the river below, and the tree frogs shrilled like violins in a crescendo sweep.

Against this, the noise of the car was a jarring note and the squeal of the brakes a harsh discord. Bohun stopped in the black shadow of an oak tree and whirled. The car had stopped at the curb before the house, and a bulky man was backing out of it. The far door opened and a thinner, shorter man slid out and walked around the front of the car. Bohun sucked in his breath sharply. His legs tingled.

Here, even here, they had found him. He had taken elaborate precautions to leave the hotel unseen—going down to the kitchen and out through the service entrance, into the alley and even climbing the concrete wall that separated the hotel from a body and fender works, and walking up to Washington Street. Yet, despite all that, there they were—the thin, rat-faced man and his killer companion.

They stood talking on the sidewalk for a moment, then furtively it seemed to Bohun, they turned into the curving gravel path. Bohun sprang behind the oak and looked quickly around him. Except for the trees, the grounds were bare. The years of falling leaves had killed off all other vegetation with slow poison.

They walked steadily though slowly toward him until he could hear the low mumble of their voices. He could run from one tree to another and possibly escape, but overhead the moon spilled its incandescence and he could clearly see the ridges in the bark of a tree twenty-five feet away. A man with a gun . . .

A gun!

His hand slid into his pocket of his topcoat and his fingers wrapped around the smooth butt of the revolver. He had forgotten about it. He wasn't going to run. He was finished with running. He knew that now.

He licked his lips, took a deep breath and called out loudly. "If you take another step, I'll fire. I'm armed!" For emphasis, he fired a shot into the ground beside him.

THE thin man whirled and ran, but the bulky one waited long enough to fire two answering shots. The bullets nicked the bark from the tree six inches from Bohun's head and he instinctively ducked. When he looked out again the man was running for the car with his arms flapping. The car was already moving when he leaped for it. He teetered on the running board, then lunged inside. The car roared straight down the hill, running without lights.

Bohun pulled his hand down his face and the palm came away glistening with sweat. He half leaned, half crouched against the tree. A muscle twitched at the corner of his eye, his mouth felt dry and scaly. His heart hammered at his ears, and his knees were liquid beneath him.

A light feminine voice called sharply, "If you move, I'll shoot."

He stiffened, grinding his teeth.

The voice ordered peremptorily, "Now step out into the path with your hands over your head. *And drop that gun!*"

The gun clattered into the dead

leaves at his feet, and Bohun took two steps out into the white moonlight that ribboned the path, his arms held out at shoulder height.

He said hotly, "Those men were shooting at *me!* Dammit, how long are you going to keep me standing here with my arms held out like antlers?"

"Take another step," the voice ordered, "I can't see you."

Bohun pulled down his arms. "The hell with this!" he said furiously. "I'm getting damn sick of people pointing guns at me. I'm Lee Bohun from *Gigantic Detective Magazine,* and I came here to see a man named Randolph. Now if you want to shoot, go ahead and get it the hell over with! I'm sick of it!"

The girl gasped and said in a small voice, "You're Mr. Bohun from *Gigantic?*"

"Believe it or not!"

He stooped and picked up his gun and put it back into his pocket. He walked truculently up the path and mounted the steps to the porch.

"You're *really* Mr. Bohun?" Her voice was even smaller.

The window to the left of the entrance was open about a foot, and resting on the windowsill was the long, gleaming barrel of a Colt Peacemaker. The girl's face was a pale blurr beyond it.

"Mr. Bohun?" she wailed.

"Lee Fawkes Bohun, and I'm mad, damn it!"

SHE mewed "Oh!' and the gun disappeared from the windowsill. The window went down and a moment later the electric light splashed yellowly through the frosted glass pane in the front door. The door opened and she stood before him, unaccountably clad in brief shorts and a bottle-green Basque shirt, striped with white. Her foamy blonde hair was combed to the top of her head and with a chartreuse ribbon, bubbling over with tiny curls. Her face was heart-shaped and set with long, hazel eyes and a wide, emotional mouth. Her legs were richly curved, beautifully molded, and so perfect you could almost —but not quite—forget they were legs at all and look upon them with the detachment of viewing a work of art.

Bohun did look upon them, but his mind did not rise to the chaste and chilly regions of art appreciation. Leg appreciation was as far as he went. He smiled.

She looked down at her legs, following his glance, and said defensively, "I was washing nightgowns. This is my evening for washing nightgowns. I always dress like this. I splash."

"A hydromaniac, probably," Bohun grinned. "It's really nothing to blush about. I had an uncle who was arrested seventeen times for setting fire to baby carriages, a rare form of race murder. He died eventually and willed me his brass knuckles. May I come in? I really have come to see Mr. A. R. Randolph. Your brother?"

The girl's flush went even deeper. "I . . . I live here alone," she stammered.

"But . . . For Heaven's s a k e! Then you're . . ."

"I'm Anne Randolph. I'm the one you came to see." Her eyes were defiant, and a little tremulous.

Bohun roared with laughter. "Well, by God!" he said, "This is a relief. All week I've been visiting all kinds of grim male authors, drinking God knows how many grim cocktails, in which I'm sure the main ingredient was the tail itself . . . If I kiss you, it's just sheer exuberance!"

"I hope not," she said primly. "Please come in."

He passed her in the doorway and

looked back at her with a long grin running up the side of his face. He said, "You remind me of a girl in chiffon way back at my first frat dance . . ." He threw his topcoat over the newel post at the foot of the broad stairway that curved up into the shadows of the house high overhead.

She walked before him into the large living room and Bohun said curiously. "Isn't this a large house to be keeping alone?"

"Terribly. Grandfather Randolph built it right after the Civil War. My father was born here, and I was born here. It costs an awful lot of money to keep up, and I can't think of any place I'd rather live. I love it here. Not just for the memories, but it's such a gracious old house. That's one of the reasons I started writing stories for *Gigantic*. I signed myself A. R. Randolph because some editors have a decided prejudice against woman writers."

"That's not prejudice," grinned Bohun. "That's just because they're senior wolves *emeritus*. Pity them."

"I was taking no chances."

THE living room was large but not enormous. It was twenty feet by thirty-five, and had fifteen-foot cove ceilings with plaster cupids in the corners. Some of the carmine paint had chipped from their lips, and they looked down at the room with the one-sided leer of lecherous eavesdroppers.

The girl nervously steered Bohun into the elaborately carved sofa before the marble fireplace. She produced a bottle of Southern Comfort from a commode and, with an unsteady hand, filled two tiny liqueur glasses. She served them on a scrolled silver tray.

"I'm really a newspaperman," she sat in a chair that obliquely faced the sofa. She crossed her legs and seemed to miss being able to pull a skirt down over her knees. "I was a reporter for five years, just a legman. But during the past year they've given me a byline and I do a daily column called *Those Slaughterhouse Blues*."

Bohun started. "Those Slaughterhouse . . ."

"The Slaughter-house," she explained hastily, "is the slum district of Newark. Fifty years ago there was a row of real slaughter-houses along the Passaic River, but they've moved out into the Kearny meadows. The name Slaughterhouse remains, and it's still full of . . . of . . . rather tough characters"

"You," said Bohun drily, "are telling me. Those two citizens shooting at me out there in your front yard were Slaughterhouse exports."

She gasped, "Good Lord!"

"I think so too. I'm getting tired of them."

"But what," she asked breathlessly, "are they after you for, Mr. Bohun?"

"Lee," he corrected her. "That's editorial policy. I get much better results from writers I call Anne, than from those I address formally as Mr. Bedpan. I don't know what they're after me for, but I'm damned and determined that they're not going to get it. I'm just plain stubborn. But that's past—I hope. Now back to you. Money seems to be your primary concern. Am I right?" He looked up at the fifteen-foot ceiling and the leering cupids.

"Money," she agreed wanly.

"Fine. There's a starting point. I was going to offer Cahill a contract for a novel. Your style and his are very similar, so I'll offer you the same proposition. We want a novel. It would pay much more money than—"

The doorbell jangled, and he sat suddenly upright on that hard sofa, clenching his hands tightly over his knees.

They stared at one another with suddenly tight eyes as the bell jangled again. She started to raise herself from the chair, but Bohun jumped up.

"I'll answer it!" he said.

He grabbed up the huge *Peacemaker* Colt from the end table and strode down the room. He did not turn on the hall light. There were two shadows against the frosted glass pane of the front door, but neither of them resembled his assailants from the Slaughterhouse. He hesitated a moment, then opened the door a crack, keeping his foot against it, holding his gun ready in his right hand.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

A heavy voice said, "Police. Mr. Randolph?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"We want to see the man who came to visit you tonight, Mr. Randolph. A Mr. Bohun. Is he still here?"

Anne Randolph had come up behind him, and Bohun looked inquiringly at her as she touched his elbow.

"They really *are* the police," she whispered. "The Newark police." That seemed to puzzle her. "That's Detective Hackenschmidt."

BOHUN turned on the light and opened the door. Standing there were two broad, thick-bodied men, with coarse-grained faces and unwinking eyes. They looked curiously alike, but not enough to be brothers. They walked in with a slow, big-handed swing to their arms.

Bohun said, "I'm Lee Bohun. How did you find me?"

Hackenschmidt permitted himself an iron smile and said, "The clerk at your hotel. You showed him a card. I'm Detective Hackenschmidt, and this is Detective Metz, Newark Police, Homicide. Hello, Miss Randolph. You're on the newpaper, ain't you?"

"That's right," she said quickly. "Let's go into the living room." She turned off the hall light and walked to the living room entrance. "It's chilly and I don't want to stand here naked. Come in."

They followed her down the room, and Hackenschmidt stood at the fireplace. Metz leaned against the wall behind the sofa.

Anne hurriedly poured four glasses of Southern Comfort and passed them around.

"I know it has a nice-nancy flavor," she said, "but it packs a brickyard wallop. It's a hundred proof." She settled herself in her chair again and said briskly, "Homicide, eh? Why homicide, Hocky?"

Hackenschmidt twirled the glass in in his hand and looked at Bohum. "Mr. Bohun," he said, "this afternoon you were at 33 Tigue Street, apartment 3-C from four until seven. Is that right?"

"Ye-e-es. I went to visit a writer named Cahill. Why?"

"Cahill?" Hackenschmidt looked at Metz, who shook his head. Hackenschmidt shook *his* head. "There's no Cahill listed in that joint."

In answer, Bohun took out the index card and handed it to the detective. The card bore Cahill's name, address, and a list of the titles of the stories Cahill had written for *Gigantic,* and at the bottom was a pencilled note from Ben Loomis, the managing editor. "Dear Lee," it said, "see if you can get this guy to do a novel for us, or, failing that, one from Randolph. Use a little of that old number 6 oil, but be fair. Ben."

Hackenschmidt turned the card over, as if expecting to find something on the back. It was blank. He rubbed it between his thumb and forefinger, then returned it to Bohun.

"Well," he said, "that may all be.

But all the same, there's no Cahill there."

Bohun offered, "Cahill may just have been the name he was writing under. Many writers don't use their right names."

"You mean the guy who lived there was a writer and he just used that name —Cahill? We-ll," he looked at Metz with just a glimmer of that iron smile, "that guy had a lot of aliases and he could have been Cahill. But writers have to pretty damn smart onions, don't they? Pardon the swearing, Miss Randolph."

She murmured, "Not at all."

BOHUN checked the wise crack that sprang to his lips. The literacy of writers was sometimes the occasion for low barnyard noises from the more learned males in the editorial rooms of *Gigantic*. But Cahill's stories of the Slaughterhouse, while tough, did show real polish and craftsmanship.

"Cahill was," he agreed.

"Then," said Hackenschmidt positively, "it wasn't this bird. His name was Abe McKinley, and he was just a plain mug. He had more names than the telephone book, but if he could sign his *own* name, he was doing good. And that brings us to you, Mr. Bohun. We found McKinley shot. A friend found him in the toilet, and gave us the buzz. The Doc says he kicked off about seven, which puts you in the apartment. What about it?"

Bohun stammered, "P-p-p-puts me —" Then, "The toilet," he said, slowly remembering, "is that the room opposite the entrance from the hall?"

Hackenschmidt said, "Yeah?" half in answer, half in question.

"I was dozing, waiting for Cahill. I thought I heard the sound of a window either opening or closing, then someone breathing very heavily in that room. I wasn't sure, and when I called his name, there was no answer and even the sound of breathing had stopped. He must . . . must . . . have died then." He looked from Hackenschmidt to Metz with a kind of sick horror faltering among his words. This was all very familiar—the everyday bread-and-butter of *Gigantic Dectective Stories*—but it was a nightmarish sort of familiarity, and he had the uneasy conviction he would presently wake up in a dentist's chair.

Hackenschmidt was saying, "And that was all you heard?"

"Well, right after that a short, thin man with a pointed face burst into the room. He seemed surprised to see me . . ."

Bohun described the two men, the fight in the hallway, the attempted hold-up in the hotel, the episode outside Anne Randolph's house.

When he finished, the two dectectives looked at one another and Metz shrugged. He said in his phlegmatic voice, "That ties it up. The same two birds Prescott put the finger on. But it don't listen. They could be in Havana by this time. There's so much neck being stuck out, you could cut it off in three foot lengths and stack it in the coal bin. I don't get it. So far we've got four. That leaves two out, not counting the one inside. I'd like to get a line on those other two wipers. Maybe something happened and they ain't got it. Could be."

Hackenschmidt pulled at his lower lip with two fingers like sausages. "Could be," he agreed.

BOHUN listened to this with complete bewilderment, but Anne sat up straight in her chair and exclaimed, "The Investors Mortgage Company!"

Hackenschmidt disregarded h e r. "Now, Mr. Bohun," he said—he was

beginning to sound as if he knew he was wasting valuable time, "you're absolutely sure you didn't talk to that bird in the toilet? Not even a word, nothing?"

"Of course I'm sure," said Bohun irritably. "I'd know if I talked with the man, wouldn't I? That's not something you can make a mistake about. Say, what is that, anyway? I seem to be the only one here who doesn't know what it's all about. Do you think I have something to do with that man's death?"

"No, it ain't that. We're pretty sure about that. We have you in that building from four to seven, and McKinley wasn't shot there. The blood trail goes up to the roof on the fireplace, across to another building and down to Kamen Street. He was in a gun fight someplace, and dragged himself home to die. As far as you're concerned, it's talking to him that's important."

"Oh yes. I see. Of course

"No, I don't think you see, Mr. Bohun." Hackenschmidt's voice was polite, but not casual. "It's this way: Even if you didn't talk to McKinley, somebody thinks you did, see?"

Cold apprehension, as swift as a spray of rain, tingled over Bohun, and he heard himself saying mechanically, "I . . . I don't understand." But he did. It was obvious. Somebody thought McKinley had named his killer to him. Not just somebody. The killer himself thought that. What was a killer? A man who was willing and able to kill. Small beads of perspiration started on Bohun's upper lip.

"It's like this." Hackenschmidt wiped the bottom of his glass on the palm of his hand and half-turned and set it on the carved marble mantel. "About a week ago, six men busted into the Investors Mortgage Company, got away with a hundred thousand bucks in bonds, shot the office manager and escaped. They wrecked their car on River Road in Belleville and one of them, maybe in a daze or something, ran straight into the river and got stuck in the mud. When the police came up a couple minutes later, he fired a few shots at them and they cut him down, but the other five got clean away. Now, somebody—maybe the office manager himself—tipped them off the bonds were coming in. They were brought in by a guy named Prescott as collateral for a loan. He was building a factory or something."

"A tool and die factory," said Anne Randolph, "on Division Street."

"Yeah. Division Street. Like I said, there was a tip-off, because five minutes after Prescott walked in with the hundred grand in his briefcase, these five guys busted in—one staying in the car. From descriptions given us by Prescott, we figure McKinley and those two mugs who were after you, were members of the gang. That's the background."

Anne Randolph was scribbling notes on a folded sheaf of copy paper. She lifted her head and asked, "What about the other two men? Do you have any lead on them?"

"No. They were at the door with sub-machine guns. Prescott didn't get a good look at them."

"But didn't *any*one get a look at them."

"Now, Miss Randolph, you oughtta know better than that. You been down in the Slaughterhouse long enough to know how it is. Nobody sees nothing, nobody hears nothing, and nobody says nothing. But maybe you know something? You know everybody down there."

She grinned. "Ha! Sure, they all love to talk to the beautiful young girl reporter—but all they want to do is boast how tough they were in Peoria,

and it always turns out to be something that happened in 1910. They know *all* about the statute of limitations. And you, Hocky, o u g h t to know that much!"

"For a fact."

BOHUN'S head turned from one to the other as they were talking, like a man watching a ping pong tournament. His quick mind had leaped over the telling of the background. He was icy calm, but the cold of it somhow seemed to have spread to his chest.

He said evenly, "You think, then, that McKinley was shot by other members of the gang that held up the Investors Mortgage Company?"

Hackenschmidt conceded, "That's about the size of it."

Bohun strove to keep his voice level, and he concealed the moisture in his palms by clenching his fingers. This was a new experience, this being stalked by a killer. "And now you think those men want to kill me because they think I know something?"

Hackenschmidt said evasively, "Well, maybe something like that." He looked quickly at Metz with that blond, flat glance of his, the kind of glance behind which stolid men so effectively hide. "We been down to the Slaughterhouse and from a word here and there, it seems like you're a pretty popular guy. Nothing," he said casually, "we can put our finger on, you understand."

Metz cut in. "He means you should have police protection until you leave for Chicago tomorrow. Hocky now," he flapped his hand at the other detective, "he'll come right out and say something right to your face if maybe you hold a knife at his throat. He's conservative. He's a Hoover Republican."

Hackenschmidt said grimly, "And Metz, he's a Democrat." There was no hostility between the two men, only a deep affection and understanding.

Bohun said, "Protection!" He gave them a frosty smile. "No, thanks. I'm not going to start that. Would you send protection to Chicago with me, to stay with me in my apartment, to go to the office with me every day? No thank you. I'm not going to live with policemen for the rest of my life— or until you catch those men." Without his realizing it, his voice had risen. He felt something tightening in his chest. He forced himself to smile. "After all, gentlemen, this is not . . ."

"Not what, Mr. Bohun?" Metz watched him like a cat about to pounce on a fledgling.

". . . a Humphrey Bogart melodrama. I've taken care of myself so far, and I intend to go on doing so. I know I can't stop you from giving me protection, but I don't want it!"

Hackenschmidt looked at him pityingly. "Just as you say, Mr. Bohun." He looked down at the hat in his hand and pinched the crown into a tighter crease. He pushed up his chin and said, "Well— let's go, Metz. And thanks, Miss Randolph, for letting us burst in like this. You, too, Mr. Bohun. Uh. Good luck."

BOHUN was still sitting on the edge of the sofa in an attitude of frozen indignation when Anne returned after closing the door behind the departing detectives. She gave him a sharp glance and filled his glass again. He threw down the drink with an abrupt chopping gesture.

The girl said slowly, "You shouldn't have turned them down, Lee."

"No?" He felt confused, stubborn. "And why not? I don't want to start feeling protected. Know what I mean? That's the beginning of fear. I don't want to live even one day of my life

in fear. Not even one!"

"And you're not afraid now? Even after what they said?"

He stared down at his shoetips, then raised his head and met her steady, anxious eyes. "It would be silly to say I'm not afraid. I am. I'm not used to having a killer after me. I don't quite know what I feel. I'm just an average citizen, and this business of killing and being killed is a kind of Alice In Wonderland fantasy. I don't quite believe it. Yet, those two men didn't look like the kind who'd conjure up a bogey man just for the hell of it. I don't know, Anne," he set his chin in the fold of his fist, "I'm scared—and I'm not."

The doorbell jangled again, and Anne went to answer it. Bohun did not protest this time. He bent his head over his folded hands and sat there, thinking. He looked up when Anne returned with Metz walking ponderously behind her.

Bohun said thinly, "So I'm getting protection whether I like it or not!"

"It ain't protection. Thanks, Miss Randolph." Metz took the glass of liquor but remained standing. "Hocky thinks it is, but I got something else in mind. Something I want you to do, Mr. Bohun."

"To do? Surely. But what?"

"Go back to 33 Tigue Street. Tonight. Right now, if you can."

Bohun blinked. "Go back to . . . Tigue Street. What good would that do?"

"Maybe you'd draw flies."

Bohun's heart lurched against his ribs. "As . . . as bait?" he stammered.

Anne cried, "No, Metz! No!"

Metz went on stolidly. "It's like this. We cops ain't supermen. Them mugs that cracked the Investors can go underground and, except for a lucky break, like somebody throwing his guts, we'd never know no difference. But you're a kind of lead for us, Mr. Bohun," he said earnestly. "You're something out in the open. Now, inside fifteen minutes you walk into that joint, they'll know. It's like this, what good's it gonna do me if they knock you off in Chi? No good. I want them to try it while I'm around, then maybe I can grab off a live one. See what I mean?"

Bohun moistened his lips. "I see." He was surprised to find out how difficult it was to speak two ordinary words.

Anne said indignantly, "You can't ask him to do that, Metz. It's only one of you against four of them."

"But what good would an army do?" Metz shook his head. "Cops ain't like marbles. You can't walk in with them in your pocket. So what good would a parade do? Nobody'd come near him."

"But suppose something goes wrong, Metz?"

"Goes wrong? What can go wrong? I'm going to be there. I won't go in with him, but I'll be there. What can go wrong?" He wasn't boasting. He just wasn't imaginative enough to see the terrors that might haunt an emotional person like Anne. There were no terrors for him. It was just a logical solution to a difficult problem.

Anne said soberly, "This is what it comes to, Metz—you're asking this man to risk his life just so you can make an arrest. Co-operation with the police, I know, is something. . . ."

To his surprise, Bohun found himself saying, "But it is *my* life, isn't it?" Even to himself, his voice sounded dull and heavy, like a muted cello on a rainy day. "I've always done with it as I wanted." There was too much anger in his voice, too much volume. "Always!" he said belligerently. It was not quite true.

Anne's hand flew to her mouth, and her eyes were wide above it. She shook her head and moaned, "No, Lee, no."

He nodded his head and stood. "Yes, Anne, yes." His sense of humor recovered its equilibrium. "Even the sacrificial goat has his place within the gates of Heaven."

She jumped up from her chair. "All right. Then I'll go with you. I'm a newspaper woman, damn both of you, and this is the best story I've ever had. And don't say no, Metz," she cried defiantly. "The presence of a girl wouldn't keep a killer off and you know it. I'm going."

Bohun said gently, "I won't go if you do, Anne. Look. This is the one chance I have of settling fear for all time, one way or the other. I told you I'd find that kind of living intolerable. Do you want to sentence me to it? Hell, girl," he laughed, though not very convincingly, "keep this up and I'll reject the next story you send in. And that's a threat."

She said in a flattened voice, "All right, Lee."

She walked to the door with them. Metz opened the door, walked out and turned, looking at Bohun. Anne put her hand on his arm and suddenly raised herself on tiptoe and kissed him swiftly, lightly on the cheek. "For Heavens sake, be careful," she said shakily. "You're the only editor I have!"

CHAPTER V

METZ left him on the east corner of Broad and Market street, and Bohun took the bus there and continued on alone. The groceries, the fish markets, the vegetable stores were closed, but every other window along River Street was a pulsing advertisement for beer. The juke boxes roared like black-maned lions.

Benjy was still at the corner by Fat Ben's saloon. His hand holding the cigar stopped midway to his mouth when he saw Bohun, and his jaw dropped. Bohun spun a quarter into the cap on the tray.

"For luck," he said.

"Thanks, mister." Benjy stared after him. "Kee-rist!"

Bohun strove to walk casually into the dark chasm of Tigue Street, but his heart jolted relentlessly against his chest, and he kept his hand around the gun in his pocket. His eyes slid watchfully to the bulked shadows of the houses on his right, and he walked well away from them, close to the gutter. If anything happened, he knew, it would be sudden, brutal and bloody, but even considering that, the men he was pitted against were his intellectual inferiors—that without pride—and he had that to depend upon, that and Metz, the stocky tenacity of Metz. Anne Randolph had been wrong about one thing. It wasn't just Metz against four—it was himself and Metz against four. A lessening of the odds.

As he mounted the steps to 33 Tigue Street, his mind started to run in frantic circles again, and he felt confused and wretched, a stranger in an unreal world.

But he must think clearly and calmly. The time for loud talk and inward panic was over. *Hold yourself or you're in for it,* Bohun, he thought, *this is one plot you can't blue-pencil yourself out of!*

HE CLIMBED the soggy stairs with a steady tread. Before opening the door to 3-C, he eased the gun out of his pocket, then kicked the door in with his foot and stepped quickly inside and slid to the left along the wall. His eyes were accustomed to the dark, so even in the anemic trickle of light that struggled through the grimy window beside the bed, he could see that the room was empty as when he left

it.

He sighed with audible relief and lowered the gun. The blood was beating like surf in his face. He reached for the light cord, then pulled his hand back quickly. No lights. It was better without lights.

He crossed swiftly to the toilet door and flung it open. It was a tiny room, barely large enough for the sanitary equipment inside. There was no one there either. The window was small, but it was large enough for a man to climb through. That had been demonstrated. He raised his hand and felt for the locking latch with his fingertips, but there was none. He could feel the two holes out of which the screws had been ripped, but the latch was gone. He felt a small twitch of dismay, but nothing more. The latch was of no real importance. The window would make enough noise going up to warn him if someone tried to climb in. Still, that made two doors to watch, instead of one—until Metz showed up. He took a folder of matches from his pocket, tore off the cardboard and folded it carefully into a thick, tight wedge. He forced this between the lower sash and the frame, tapping it lightly with the butt of his gun. Then he tried to raise the window against it. The window went up about an inch and stuck as the wedge jammed against a joint in the frame and seemed immovable.

He stepped back and regarded it earnestly. He tapped the wedge again with the butt of his revolver. He licked the perspiration from his upper lip and turned back to the other room. There were things to do here, and he thought about it with the serious concentration of a three-year-old arranging a set of blocks. His face puckered up and he bit at a fingernail. He had to sit some place, and the lounge chair was the logical seat, but where should he put it? It was a major problem. He glanced quickly around the room. Yes, over against the wall beside the toilet door would be the best place. He dragged it over and sat in it.

He laid the gun carefully in his lap, arranging it one way and the other until he had it in the best position for a quick snatch.

Now he was getting some place! Now suppose a man came through that door over there, and he had a gun in his hand. . . . That was the problem, and Bohun folded his eyebrows over it. The man had a gun, and there was that gun in his own lap. How fast could he get it up and fire? He grabbed at it, but his inarticulate fingers knocked it from his thighs to the floor at the first try. No, no, no, that would never do. He had to do better than that, to stay alive. He picked the gun up and re-set it in his lap.

It was a game, a ruse to keep his mind from dwelling on the gathering menace outside the room. He snatched at the gun a few times and levelled it at the door. That was better! He put a cigarette in his mouth and tried to light it with wildly fluttering fingers. Ah, now he had another problem to solve! Anything to keep his mind busy.

But where was Metz!

He took a deep, hungry drag at the cigarette and walked across the room. It wasn't fear. Of course, it wasn't fear. But he should be permitted a little normal anxiety, shouldn't he? A quickening of the pulse, a little jumpiness. Perfectly natural. Even the fluttering of his hands was to be expected. He was a human being, sensitive, imaginative. . . . It was all right for a stolid, phlegmatic person like Metz to—

Where was Metz?

HE STRODE over to the window and cleaned a spot about two

inches in diameter, and through it he could see clear up the street to Fat Ben's saloon on the corner, but there was something wrong there—something wasn't quite right. He snapped his fingers. Benjy! Where was Benjy? The beggar and his express wagon were gone!

It came to him slowly, but when he had it he tightened his fingers into the palms of his hands until the nails bit into the skin. Of course! And it was so obvious. His first intuitive flash had been right. Benjy! Benjy had been the lookout, the finger, the tip-off man for the gang that robbed Investors! Sure! What better man for the job than a beggar on the corner, a beggar who saw everything, knew everybody. Of course it was Benjy!

The sound of footsteps on the stairs brought him away from the window with a rush. He crouched against the wall beside the door, with his gun in his hand. The knob of the door turned and the door swung in. Metz walked across the threshold. Bohun could have shouted with relief.

He cried, "Metz!" as if it were a prayer of thanksgiving and stepped around the door.

But Metz had not advanced any farther into the room. His both hands were clasped to his stomach and he looked at Bohun with a strange, wild expression on his face. A bubble of blood burst at the corner of his mouth, and he folded slowly over his hands and pitched forward to the floor.

In that dreadful moment it seemed to Bohun that his sanity was nothing more than a balloon on a string, and only by the most desperate of efforts did he manage to cling to it.

That meant courage, that meant holding on, thinking. Think, Bohun, think! But his mind was the vortex of a dreadful whirlpool of terror. Bohun! Bohun! He ground his teeth until the sound of it shattered the humming at his eardrums. He forced himself to the thin edge of sanity and teetered there.

He looked down at Metz, almost with detachment. The detective was clearly dead. The slowly congealing blood had spilled over the backs of his hands and was sluggishly spreading on the floor.

Setting his jaw, Bohun slipped his hands under Metz's armpits and dragged him away from the door. His movements became faster. He darted across the room, seized the lounge chair and thrust it against the door so hard the floor quivered from the force of it. Yes, that was better. He was sweating, and he kept licking it from his lips. He changed the gun over to his left hand and dried his right hand by rubbing it up and down his thigh. It would never do to have a sweaty, slippery hand.

When the knock came on the door it was like an electric shock, and he could have screamed. He leaped back into the center of the floor.

A voice called, "Lee! Lee!" It was Anne Randolph.

He jumped and pulled the chair away from the door, and after she had slid through the narrow opening he allowed her, he slammed it back again.

She seized his arms and panted, "Lee, you have to get out of here! Downstairs . . . the men. . . ." She caught sight of Metz huddled against the baseboard and she moaned, stepping slowly backward away from the body. "Is he . . . is he. . . .?"

Bohun snapped "Yes," over his shoulder and ran into the bathroom. He battered down the window with his fist, jerked out the cardboard wedge, and thrust up the sash. "This way, Anne!" he shouted. He leaned out the window and looked down through the

iron slats of the fire escape. Two stories below a man was standing on the hanging ladder with his arm outstretched for the next rung, and when he saw Bohun he yelled and a spear of flame spurted from his hand. Bohun heard the lead spatter against the iron of the fire escape and he pulled in his head.

Anne was standing behind him, and he seized her arm and whirled her around. She grasped at his arm.

"The back way!" she gasped. "The rear entrance. . . ."

HE HELD her hand as they flew down the stairway. The danger point was at the turning under the light in the lower hall, but they sped around it and lunged into the darkness of the rear hall. Bohun felt along the wall until his fingers touched the rear door. He turned the knob and eased the door inward. It opened to a narrow alley, enclosed by a high board fence. He stuck his head out. Light showed at the end far to the right. He tugged at Anne's hand.

"Let's go," he whispered.

They had taken but two steps when a sudden brilliance flooded them and their shadows sprawled before them in ungainly caricature.

A voice said harshly, "That's far enough, mister."

Bohun said involuntarily, "Benjy!"

"Shut up!" The light went out and they could hear the grating of the wagon wheels as the beggar wheeled himself closer. The tongue of the wagon slid between Bohun's feet.

For a moment there was only silence, then a chorus of shouts and a burst of wild shooting. A man leaped into the mouth of the alley, steadied himself and fired three shots back into the street. The following silence fell like a clap of thunder. The man turned and ran toward them, his silhouette bobbing against the oblong of light at the far end of the alley.

"Okay, Benjy," he cried, "It's okay. Did they come out?"

The flashlight spotted Bohun and Anne again. "There they are," the beggar's voice gloated. "Where's Skinny?"

Bohun recognized the gunman who had so relentlessly followed him. The gunman raised his hand and drew his finger across his throat in a gruesomely expressive gesture, grimaced and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

He looked avidly at Bohun and demanded of Benjy. "Has he got it?"

Benjy growled, "I'm here by myself. I wasn't taking no chances looking."

"You God damned dumb gimp! He could have thrown it over the fence." He glared savagely at Bohun and held out his hand. "The briefcase, bud. Where's the briefcase?"

Anne snapped, "He doesn't have it."

The gunman leered at her, "The hell he ain't, sister. I seen it."

"That was his own briefcase, you fool. There's nothing in it but papers. Tell him, Lee."

Bohun's breathing was quick and shallow, and when he spoke it sounded as if he had been running. "Stories . . . contracts . . . letters . . ." He licked his lips as if he felt the taste of death on them. "That's all." His teeth were chattering.

The girl faced the gunman scornfully, "You're not even sure McKinley had it. And the other two," she pointed down the alley with her chin, "thought *you* had it. And McKinley thought I had it. Don't you realize by this time nobody has it?"

The gunman laughed harshly. "Those other two," he jeered, "ain't gonna do no more thinking about nothing—like Skinny." But his eyes were un-

easy and bewildered. "What do you mean nobody's got it?"

The girl's smile was as drawn as the spine of death. "It's in the river."

THE gunman swore softly. He snapped his fingers. "Sonny had it on his lap when we hit the tree. He must have carried it with him when he ran into the river, then dropped it when they gunned him. It's buried in the mud. So it's still there!" He looked at Bohun. "Let's get rid of this monkey and pick it up."

She jumped in front of Bohun and cried, "No!"

The gunman stared at her. "Are you nuts, sister? This guy let loose can put the finger on us in forty-eight states. The hell with that! Dump him in the river and forget it!"

Bohun's pulse drummed in his ears and a hot flame of rage shot through him, consuming his panic. There they were, talking about killing him as if he were just so much meat, a sheep, or a chicken, indifferent to his feelings. He felt the muscles gather at his shoulders.

Anne said desperately, "No! No! Listen, you can have my share, but let him alone. Do you hear me? *Let him alone!*"

"Ah, for Christ sake!" the gunman swung his hand and lashed her across the mouth with the back of his hand.

She uttered a high, thin cry and fell back against the wall and down across Bohun's legs. And in that moment, Bohun acted, galvanized by a sudden blind fury. He stooped as if to pick her up, but his left hand reached back and grasped the front axel of the wagon. When he straightened up, the wagon came with him, spilling the beggar out backward.

With a thrust of his arm, he sent Anne Randolph sprawling to her knees and fired through the cloth of his pocket. The gunman screamed in the darkness. Bohun went down on his hands and knees and crawled along the side of the building. His hand fell on the hard coldness of the flashlight, then bumped against Benjy's gun, lying on the cement. He turned on the light and Benjy cringed against the board fence, his mouth rotted with fear. With a cold viciousness, of which he would never have thought himself capable, Bohun clubbed him across the forehead with the barrel of the gun. Benjy groaned and sagged against the fence.

Bohun stood and played the flash down the alley. The gunman was lying on his back, his mouth open and his arms flung wide, the blood spreading across the front of his shirt like the points of a poinsettia. Anne Randolph was on her knees, blinking up at him. He reached down and helped her to her feet.

"You have to get out of here!" he whispered urgently. "Quick! The police will be here any minute! Come on!"

Then, suddenly, he realized she wasn't coming. She hung back from his hand and when he turned the flash on her she leaned against the wall and looked at him, and her eyes were leaden with despair.

She started, "No, I . . ."

Behind them a gun bayed and she stiffened and rose up high on her toes. Her hands flew to her back and an expression of inutterable agony spread over her face. She fell forward against Bohun and grasped his lapels, holding herself against him, as if for a shield.

Bohun swung the flashlight around her side. Benjy had propped himself against the fence and in his right hand gleamed the stubbiness of a belly gun smoking, his left hand raised to shade his eyes from the light. Bohun pulled the trigger of his gun. He did not even

see the horrible thing that had happened to the beggar's face as the bullets destroyed it.

He lowered Anne gently to the walk and bent over her. She whispered, "Told Hocky . . . in the river . . . couldn't live with myself. . . ."

HOW long he crouched there over her body he did not know, but he did not look up until Hackenschmidt's voice reminded him, "She's dead, Mr. Bohun."

He slipped his arm out from under her and stood. "Yes," he said dully, "I guess she is." The alley was thronged with uniformed policemen. He had not noticed their coming.

Hackenschmidt said, "She called me up. Spilled the works. She was the tip-off for the gang. She knew all about the Prescott deal, being a reporter. It was the money. Desperate, she said. It ain't doing her no harm being dead. I'd only have had to take her in. They knocked off the Investors office manager. She'd have burned. She's better off. . . . What's the matter, Mr. Bohun?"

In the same dead voice, Bohun said, "I suppose so." Then in a harsh, brutal voice, born of inner pain, "So you lose a prisoner, and *Gigantic* loses two writers. She was Cahill. That's just a guess, but she was, all right. Two writers—Christ!"

He turned and stumbled into the hallway, feeling his way blindly along the wall. Hackenschmidt looked after him with pity behind his iron smile.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah. And that's why your eyes are rolling in tears. Sure!"

THE END

CAMERA IN CLAY

OUT of the University of Chicago Anatomy Laboratory recently came this astounding statement: "An accurate, reliable head restoration can be made on the basis of measurements taken from an unknown skull—and such a restoration can be useful for purposes of identification." It was the result of many tests and a painstaking experiment made by Assistant Professor W. M. Krogman and his sculptor aid.

Occasionally in the annals of crime there occurs the discovery of a set of bones, sometimes only a skull, which through rumor but not fact can be connected with an old unsolved murder. The police look toward the expert in anatomical research to provide them with the necessary clues as to the identity of the victim. Through a system of measurements, the expert in the past has been able to supply merely information regarding racial type and age, and a few guesses as to the outer facial appearance. But the accuracy of such information and its usefulness was often questioned by both the police and the public. Krogman's experiment has done much to allay that doubt.

The head of a corpse used by the students for anatomical research was photographed carefully from all views. It was measured accurately with scientific instruments and charts were assembled recording the most minute details of skin thicknesses on all areas of the face. Then the head was dissected. All tissues were removed until only the bone remained. The skull was allowed to dry for one month when it finally reached the condition in which most skulls are found when the problem of identification is presented.

Now the most crucial steps in the operation remained to be taken. The "unknown" skull was presented to the sculptor with only the following information as a guide: the probable age, sex, and racial type established by the bone structure, measurements taken from the dried skull itself, and charts giving average skin thicknesses established for that specific age, sex, and racial type.

Certain clues on the dried skull itself aided the sculptor in determining the facial appearance of the clay restoration. The position and condition of the teeth proved to be the most important of these.

Slowly the head was reconstructed entirely in clay with only scientific averages as guides. The sculptor was not permitted to see the original photograph of the corpse taken before dissection or to study those charts on skin thicknesses that Krogman had so carefully prepared.

Both scientist and sculptor were amazed to find such a striking similarity when they finally compared the completed head restoration with the photographs.

It is no longer possible for the skeleton in anyone's closet to hide its identity!

—*A. Morris*

THE CRIMINAL CRANK

By
GARY LEE HORTON

J. EDGAR HOOVER has said that one of the worst obstacles impeding criminal detection agencies today is the "crank"—the person who seldom commits a crime, yet in every sense of the word is a criminal. Our newspapers report cases involving cranks daily; often they are arrested, but generally they are quickly released.

No major crime is committed in the United States but that at least a few of them make an appearance. Sometimes they accuse themselves and demand to be arrested for the crime; sometimes they merely involve themselves by adding their own ransom notes to those of a kidnaper; or they send false and misleading messages to the police describing the activities and whereabouts of criminals.

The Lindbergh case is a classic example of the activity of cranks. Almost immediately following the first accounts in the newspapers of the kidnaping crank letters and cards began to arrive from everywhere in the country, sometimes directed to the police, sometimes to the Lindbergh family. Most often they claimed to have abducted the baby. Some wrote long, cruel letters in which they described in great detail their methods of torturing and killing the child. Some, on the other hand, wrote messages which falsely raised the hope of the parents, claiming to have the baby in safekeeping and promising to return him.

The recent murder of the Degnan child in Chicago brought out a number of cranks. Probably the most fiendish of them all was the person who sent Mrs. Degnan a human ear along with the message "Yours next."

A great many cranks make "full confessions." A little investigation generally proves positively that the would-be criminal could not possibly have committed the crime. Often he is not even clear as to what crime was committed, what the location was, what weapons were used and other vital details. Very often he has been in an entirely different vicinity at the time the crime was committed, sometimes in another part of the country.

Probably one of the most bizarre cases of this sort came up a few years ago when Wac Cpl. Maoma L. Ridings was brutally murdered in her hotel room in Indianapolis, Indiana. Mystery still shrouds Wac Ridings' murder, and the murderer remains unknown. Yet four persons—all innocent—have "confessed" they committed the crime!

The first came from an 18-year-old boy, but was immediately discounted as false. The second "confession" came from a 23-year-old woman. At 3 A.M. a few days after the Wac's death she hailed a taxi and asked to be driven to police headquarters where she could confess the crime. Once there she gave the police an account of a quarrel the two had engaged in and which resulted in her killing the Wac. She was placed in jail, while the police—already weary of "crank" leads in the case—checked her story. It was proven immediately that she had not been near the scene of the murder.

The third "confession" was probably the most ridiculous. A routine questioning by the police made it apparent that the man who had "confessed" had almost no knowledge of the facts of the crime "he had committed." He was released at once.

A few weeks passed, and a fourth "confession" was produced. Of all, this was the strangest. It was now about two months since the crime had been committed, and all possible leads had been futilely followed up. Suddenly a convicted burglar whose name was Luallen, said he was guilty of the murder. He was rushed from the Michigan City State Prison where he was serving time to Indianapolis to sign a confession.

It was his wife, he told the sheriff, who had actually killed the Wac. And Luallen described vividly how the two women had quarreled over him and how finally, in a rage, his wife seized a whiskey bottle and threw it at the Wac, cutting her throat and killing her. He and his wife had then rushed out, undetected.

For a time the police actually thought they had the guilty person. That is, until the next morning. Retracting his former signed statement, the burglar said his wife was not in the least implicated in the crime and that he alone had killed the Wac.

In short order, of course, the police discovered that both these fantastic "confessions" were entirely untrue. Luallen, on the night of the murder, had been at work in a bakery and not even near the vicinity of the crime. His wife had been visiting with relatives in Tennessee at the time it happened.

For some time, Luallen stubbornly refused to be released, and was even arraigned on a charge of first degree murder. He was never indicted or brought to trial, however, on the basis of the obvious untruth of his statement.

Today, fully three years after the investigation opened, the murder of Wac Cpl. Ridings still remains an unsolved mystery. Cranks, in this case, as in thousands of other unsolved crimes, have thus obstructed justice. The police, anxious to follow up every lead involving a crime, must necessarily investigate those false clues produced by fakers. The time thus lost in useless activity often is responsible for the failure of conscientious detectives to seize the real criminals.

The Wrong Witness

by H. B. Hickey

THE meeting broke up at midnight. Then George and some of the other young men stopped in for a few drinks before splitting up. After that, George set off down the quiet street toward his bus stop.

He was about as drunk as he ever got. That meant that he could see quite well, without any confusing double images, but couldn't walk without a slight stagger. And he was happy.

Always when he was drunk, he was happy. Why not? Few men were as fortunate as he, to have a wife who understood that a man had to go out with the boys occasionally and bend his elbow a few times.

There was a fellow coming down the street toward him, and George just had to tell him about Myra. He moved uncertainly into the man's path and waited. Had to tell him about Myra; not just that she was so understanding, you know. Lots of other excellent qualities. George couldn't keep the leer off his face.

"You married?" he demanded as the stranger came up to him.

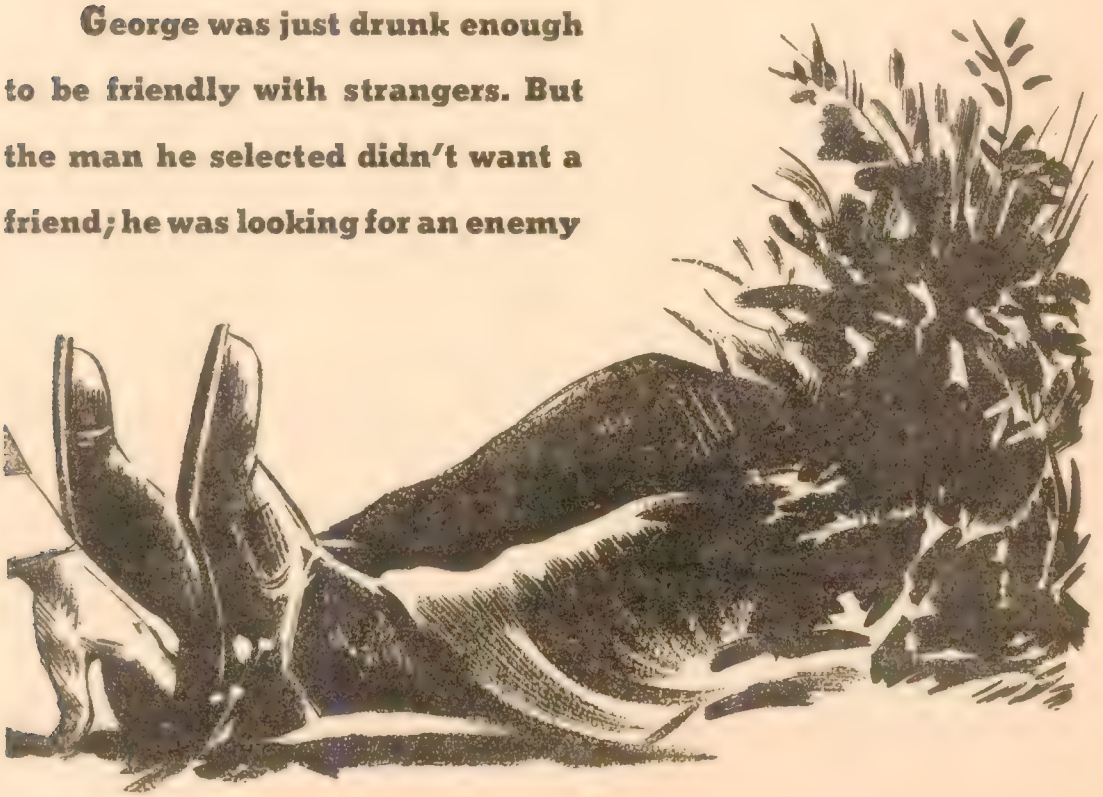
There was a street light behind George and he could see the man's features. They weren't the features George would have picked for himself. He giggled at the thought. Who wanted a broken nose and a white scar zigzagging across his cheek? And a hairline that started just two inches above thick, straight eyebrows?

"Get away from me, lush," the man said in a hard voice.

"Now, friend," George protested, "don't let's be hostile. Just want to tell you about my little wife."

He tried to smile pleasantly but the right side of his mouth insisted on

George was just drunk enough to be friendly with strangers. But the man he selected didn't want a friend; he was looking for an enemy



curling higher than the left side. He side-stepped into the stranger's path as the man tried to go around him.

"You're asking for it," the hard voice said.

"Don't want to talk about my wife?" George asked incredulously. "All right, let's have a little general conservation . . . I mean conversation. Pick your own subject."

But the man didn't seem to be loquacious. He tried to duck around George on the other side. Unfortunately for him the sidewalk was narrow, with a low pipe fence on both sides to protect the lawns.

"Oh," George laughed as he slid across in front of the other, "you want to play! All right with me. Used to be a boxer and wrestler. Footwork's pretty good."

There was a note of desperation in the other man's voice and it wasn't so hard. "Look, fellow, why don't you go on home? Your wife'll be worried about you."

"Just what I wanted to tell you," George said. "Wife never worries about me. Come home whenever I damn please."

The scarred man turned nervously and looked behind himself. Then he hopped over the pipe fence.

But George was too quick for him. With an amazing bound from a standing position, George cleared the fence and stood blocking the other's way again. A merry laugh bubbled from his lips.

"Too fast for you, wasn't I? Got to do better'n that to beat old George."

In the light from the street lamp George could see the perspiration starting on the low brow. The stranger was shaking his head nervously as he straddled the low fence, then got both feet back on the walk again. George stayed in front of him. He was beginning to get a real kick out of this game the other had started.

The stranger thought for a moment, then stuck one hand in his coat pocket. He looked over George's shoulder. "Say," he muttered, "if you want to play, here comes a guy who looks like he'd enjoy it."

George turned to look, and something hit the back of his skull and tipped it forward and down over his eyes so he couldn't see a thing. . . .

HE SEEMED to be standing with his face pressed against a stone wall, because when he tried to get his hand up to push his skull back in place it kept scraping the wall. And he couldn't see. He was sure that if he could push his skull back the pain in his head would go away.

It took quite a while for George to realize that there was no stone wall. His face was merely pressed flat against the sidewalk. And the reason he couldn't see was that his eyes were shut.

He opened them and pushed himself over on his back. That made it worse because everything was spinning around and it made him sick. By holding on to the fence he managed to get to his feet.

He wasn't drunk now. This was worse; it felt like a crew of the little green men in the street car ads were working on his head with their pneumatic hammers. George dropped to a sitting position on the fence, teetered for a second or two, and fell back onto the lawn and lay there with his face against the cool grass. He was sick again.

Then he felt better; well enough to remember what had happened, and to hope that he'd run into the broken nosed man again. George got to his feet and started toward home.

Walking was difficult. Every time he raised his head the pain became almost unbearable. So he walked in a stooped position, like an arthritic old man, with his eyes roving over the sidewalk and the well kept lawns. That was how he found the body.

It was lying behind a bush, some ten feet from a red brick bungalow, with the polished counter of the right shoe reflecting a stray beam of light that caught George's eye.

"Oh, oh," George grunted. "Another victim. That guy's been active tonight."

He tried to jacknife gracefully over the low fence and found that he was either still drunker than he thought, or that the blow on his head had ruined his coordination. But he managed to get across and approached the shining shoe still bent over.

"Hey!" George said thickly. "You hurt bad?"

There was no answer, so George dropped carefully to one knee and shook the foot from side to side. Something in the limpness of that foot sent a warning shiver up his spine. But sober, drunk, or concussed, George was not one to run.

On both knees now, he crawled alongside the still figure to where its head lay in the circle of bare earth around the base of the bush.

"Hey!" George tried again. Still no answer.

He clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Out. Out like a light."

The man was lying face down and George reached out a hand and ran it across his shoulders. Just below the collar the sticky dampness started. The neck was coldly wet and the hair was thoroughly soaked. With sick unwillingness George pressed down gently. The back of the head was far too soft.

Nausea lined George's throat with bitterness and he withdrew his hand. "Oh my," he said weakly. "Dead."

HE STARTED to wipe his hand on the dead man's coat sleeve and changed his mind. Instead, he ran his palm over the grass several times. Then he got to his feet and stared uncertainly at the dark windows of the bungalow.

Ought to wake someone and ask him to call the police, he thought. No, there would be a copper at the corner where the bus stopped, only two blocks away. For some reason that seemed a better idea.

The pain in his head had become intermittent, permitting him to straighten up most of the time. He ran with a queer, long legged glide that didn't jar him too much. At Michigan and Burton he found the policeman, leaning against the fender of a taxicab and talking to the driver.

"Say," George puffed. His breath made them draw back.

The copper gave him a red faced, suspicious stare. "What'll it be, lad?" he asked.

"There's a—" George began. A stab of pain made him wince. "What a head!" he said irrelevantly.

"I wouldn't doubt it," the copper said. The cab driver winked at him.

"Wait a minute," George told them. "I'm not drunk."

"Well, you sure had me fooled," the cop grunted. "Something told me you were."

He pulled back as George leaned close to him. "Easy now, lad. Those ice cream sodas you've been drinking have given you a breath that could floor a horse."

He let out a gruff guffaw and the driver joined him. George cursed under his breath. The cop pulled down the

corners of his mouth and put a hand on his nightstick. His eyes were narrowed as he stepped close.

"Did you say something?" he asked.

"Uh, uh," George grunted. "I was just trying to tell you—" His voice faded off as another agonizing pain made his head swim. He grabbed the door handle for support.

"Now I'll tell *you* something," the cop said. "Go on home and sleep it off."

"But—"

The copper cut him off. "Now be on your way, lad. Or else I'll have to take you in."

"But I saw—"

"I know," the cop said. "But don't you worry. They'll be gone in the morning." He twirled the nightstick suggestively and George stepped away.

"Got any money?" the cab driver asked. "I'll take you home."

George fished out a couple of bills and showed them to him. He got in the cab and gave the driver the address. Then he sat and muttered to himself all the way. "All right. That's the way you want it, that's the way it's gonna be."

In fact, as he thought it over, it was better this way. By morning someone else would report the body. And in the second place, he didn't want to get mixed up in a murder anyway. They might even suspect him. Better not say anything to Myra either. She'd just worry about it.

Myra wasn't up. She must have got very sleepy waiting for him because she didn't even stir when he crawled under the covers. Lying next to her, with his head on a soft pillow, George didn't notice the pain so much. In a few minutes he was asleep.

IN THE morning he felt better. He awoke to the smell of fresh coffee and sizzling bacon. Looking at Myra didn't retard his recovery any, either. Even at the breakfast table her skin looked creamy and her eyes were clear. She wore her dark hair upswept and her robe didn't conceal her figure. George took a gulp of hot coffee and whistled appreciatively.

"A bucket of blood," Myra said.

George stared at her. "What kind of a thing is that to say at the breakfast table?" he demanded.

"What kind of thing is that to keep me awake with half a night?" she countered. "Buckets of blood, buckets of blood. Where did the lodge meet last night, at a slaughterhouse?"

"Oh, that," George said casually. "Must have been a dream." Maybe it was at that. He ran his hand down the back of his head and felt the lump there. So it hadn't been a dream.

"Where's the paper?" he wanted to know.

"On the front porch, where it usually is." She watched him expectantly. "Well, what are you waiting for? Who was your servant last year?"

"You," he grinned.

She shook her head sadly. "You're almost irresistible. Almost. Get it yourself."

He got up. Then he came in and read it from beginning to end. There was no mention of a murder. George went back and made sure he hadn't missed anything.

He looked up to find Myra watching him. "Some paper this morning, eh, George?" she said sweetly. Usually, he read just the sport pages and the comics.

George knew that she smelled something and he tried to evade the issue. "Lots of news today," he told her. "Foreign developments and stuff."

"I'm sure you're an international authority on stuff," Myra grunted. "By the way, what kind of stuff were you drinking last night?"

"The usual. And mix one for your-

self."

"Don't give me that double talk." She eluded his clutch and dodged around the table. "And save the romance for later. What about that dream?"

George shrugged. "Oh, that. Well, in the first place, a man isn't responsible for his dreams. And in the second place, you know as well as I that any woman in my dreams merely represent you."

Myra seemed satisfied. "Oh. Is that why you bashed in her head?"

It caught him by surprise. "It wasn't a woman!"

"Meaning, it was a *man?*" She was trying to sound flippant and not succeeding very well. Horror leaped into her eyes as she realized the implication. Then shock drained her face of blood and left it a sick, oyster color.

George jumped forward and grabbed her. His grip was hard, hurting Myra, but it brought her back to her senses. She steadied, and felt the color flood back into her cheeks.

Then he gave her an impatient shake. "Meaning I didn't bash anyone's head. Neither man nor woman. You ought to know me better than that!"

Myra's relief made George a little ashamed. "I didn't want to mention it for fear of upsetting you. But I almost had my own skull cracked last night." He took her hand and ran it over the back of his head so she could feel the lump.

"There. Aren't you sorry?"

"You ought to know *me* better than *that,*" Myra said. "Furthermore, you still haven't explained about the blood. Or why you had to read the paper so thoroughly this morning."

She transfixed him with her glare. "Give, Georgie," she said warningly.

HE THREW up his hands. Once Myra had her mind made up that he was holding out on her there would be no rest for him. So he began at the beginning and told her all about it. Myra listened without once interrupting him.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked when he had finished.

She shrugged. "I don't know. Just how drunk were you?"

"Not that bad. I didn't imagine it."

"Then the question is: why hasn't someone else reported it by now?"

"And the answer probably is that the police are holding out the information for reasons of their own," George guessed.

Myra shook her head. "I doubt it. If someone had reported finding the body there would be at least a mention of it in the paper. There's something fishy about this, and I'd like to know what it is."

George stuck out his palm to her, as though to push her away. "Now wait a minute! I narrowly avoided getting myself entangled last night. Let the cops solve their own murders."

His wife wasn't paying the least bit of attention to him. "Mighty strange," she mused. "A man gets his head bashed in and it doesn't even rate a line in the paper. Why? Because nobody reported it. Again—why?"

"How the hell would I know?"

He had that sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. The end of this discussion was becoming painfully clear to him. Myra had struck a pose she remembered from her college days, when she had appeared in Macbeth. And that bode no good, George knew.

" 'Murder' " she quoted in a hollow voice. " 'Murder most foul and unnatural.' "

"Going out for a pack of cigarettes," he interrupted genially. "Be back in a week or two."

"George!" He stopped in mid-step.

"George, it is our duty as citizens—"

"Like hell it is. I tried to tell that cop last night and he told me to go home and sleep it off. So forget it!" He gave her what he hoped was a discussion-closing look.

It had as much effect as a pea shooter on a tank. "Now here's what we'll do," Myra continued.

"What you'll do, maybe. Include me out, honey."

Myra shook her head sadly. "That's how democracies die, because of the indifference of the citizens."

"Now she's blaming me for Hitler," George told the ceiling.

Before she could speak again he pointed a finger at her. "Tell you what I'll do, honey. Someone may be down at the station this very minute. In that case I'd feel like a fool. Besides, I'd be in hot water for not reporting it last night. So let's wait and see if it isn't in the afternoon papers. If not, I promise I'll go with you this evening."

"Well, all right," Myra agreed doubtfully.

BUT she strained at the leash all day. By evening, George was heartily sick of news broadcasts, and tired from running out after later and later editions of the same papers. And his eyes were strained from poring over those papers.

Myra didn't bother to read the papers or listen to the newscasts. She put her hair up and prepared her best outfit so she could wear it to the station.

"Just think of it, George," she said as they got into the car that evening. "It'll be so dramatic! One word from you and the whole machinery of the law will start rolling!"

A half hour later George was saying sarcastically to her, "They forgot to oil the machinery." His first statement to the desk sergeant had brought a slack-mouthed "Huh?"

"You don't speak clearly enough," Myra told George. She looked up at the sergeant and articulated carefully, "My husband wants to report a murder."

The sergeant got interested. "Then why didn't he say so?" He squinted at George. "Where?" he demanded.

George told him. And stopped.

"Go on," the sergeant said petulantly, "do I have to drag it out of you with a pliers? When?"

George squirmed. He knew what was coming. "Last night. Or rather, this morning. About one o'clock."

The sergeant's glare was withering. "This morning! You took your own sweet time getting here, didn't you?"

"I tried to report it to a policeman," George said defensively. "He told me to go home and sleep it off."

He saw a bluecoat emerge from a door at the left of the desk. "There he is now!"

The sergeant looked. "Hey, Crieger!" He jerked his head in their direction and the cop came slowly toward them. "He's going out now. On the eight to four shift," the sergeant explained.

"What do you want, Brinn?" Crieger asked as he came up.

"This guy here," Brinn said, pointing at George, "says he tried to report a murder to you last night."

Crieger looked at George. The cop's face was pale, so that the network of red veins on his nose were startlingly clear. Then he jutted his jaw belligerently at Brinn. "Not to me, he didn't!" Crieger asserted.

He looked at George again and nodded in sudden recognition. "Now I remember you," he grinned. He turned again to the sergeant. "He didn't report no murder. He was so drunk I

almost ran him in."

George started a slow burn. "If you'd kept your mouth shut and listened, I would have told you all about it!"

"Ha!" Crieger sounded like a seal barking. "You would have told me! You wouldn't have told me anything. I I know all you drunks."

It was too much for Myra. If anyone was going to make disparaging remarks about George, it wasn't going to be Crieger.

"You ought to know about drunks is right," she sneered. "That nose of yours would cost a fortune even if booze was cheap!"

"Why . . ." Crieger purpled and became speechless with rage.

George had his right hand cocked; if the cop insulted Myra, he was going to put one right on his button.

"Shut up!" Brinn was yelling to all of them.

From behind Myra came a quiet voice, a woman's voice, trying to make herself heard. "Excuse me please," it said. "Excuse me."

SHE was small but well formed, with black, straight hair that was pulled back tightly and rolled into a bun at the back of her neck. Her eyes were wide and dark and frightened in her white, cameo face. She was about thirty-five or so.

"What is it, lady?" Brinn asked.

"I want to report a missing person," she said hesitantly. "My husband."

"Missing Persons Bureau is the place you should go," Brinn told her. "But I guess we can help you." He told Crieger to show her to the proper office and watched them go down a corridor. Then he turned again to George and Myra.

"There's something fishy here," he said. "People don't let stiffs lay around all day without calling the cops. I got a hunch Crieger is right about you. But we'll have to send someone out anyway."

He picked up the desk phone and called a Sergeant Lane who turned out to be an angular, thin haired and slow spoken man in plain clothes. Lane didn't seem too interested but he listened to George's story and then took him and Myra and bundled them into a squad car.

"Address?" He didn't waste words.

"It was too dark to see it," George told him. "But I can pick out the house when we get there."

It wouldn't have been so easy, though, if not for the peony bush in the center of the lawn. Every house in the block was a red brick bungalow, and only in the landscaping was there any individuality. This lawn was easily the greenest and the circle of grass around the peonies had been perfectly trimmed with a shears. Light poured from the living room windows to reveal underneath them a thick border of nasturtiums and asters that George had not seen the night before.

"This is it," he said positively.

"Okay." A gentle pressure of Lane's foot on the brake pedal was enough to stop the slowly rolling car. The three got out into the gathering dusk.

Myra stayed on the sidewalk for fear of soiling her white pumps but George and Lane went over the little fence and walked across the lawn. The grass was dry; yet the ground underneath felt soggy, as though it had been watered only a few minutes before.

Lane pointed behind the bush. "That where it was?"

As the two men leaned over so George could outline the exact position of the body, a window opened above them.

"Get away from those flowers," a man snarled.

His head and shoulders were out of the window but the light came from behind him so they couldn't see his face. Lane slowly straightened and hauled his badge out of his pocket as though it weighed a hundred pounds.

"Police," he said with his usual economy of words.

"I don't give a damn who you are. Get off my lawn!"

"Okay. Open the door. Want to talk to you."

The head and shoulders vanished and the window slammed down. A moment later, as Lane, George and Myra started up the stairs, the door was flung open.

"Well?" the unpleasant voice asked.

"Ask them in," a woman said from behind him.

"Mind your own business," he snapped back over his shoulder.

"Talk better inside," Lane suggested laconically. The man in the doorway stepped aside grudgingly and they went past him.

THE furniture was dull, heavy, and built for wear. They hardly noticed it. The redhead on the couch opposite the false fireplace would have distracted attention from flashier surroundings. Although she wore a housecoat, her purse was on the couch beside her and its contents had been scattered about considerably. She didn't look unhappy at the intrusion.

Behind them, the door shut and the man followed them into the room. He was at least ten years older than the redhead, and not as tall as she, and his dark hair was shot with gray. But he had a hard, youthful body that seemed at east in his tuxedo.

"I'm Gus Antheme and this is my wife," he said without formality. "What're you prowling around my lawn for?"

"Looking for the dead man who was there this morning," Lane said with equal abruptness.

"The what?"

"You heard me."

"Listen, I've got to go to work. I haven't time to waste on riddles. Talk plain if you want an answer."

Lane disregarded that. "Just going to work? Late, aren't you?"

"No. I'm head waiter at the French Quarter." The French Quarter was one of the best night clubs in the city. "I don't take a night off so I come down late twice a week," Antheme continued.

"What time do you get home?" Lane asked.

"About three in the morning. Why?"

Lane kept changing the subject. "Good job, I'll bet. Lots of dough."

Antheme got red in the face. "What do you care how much money I make? Are you an income tax investigator too?" He looked harried. "It's not bad enough that I have to contend with those snotty waiters. I have to listen to a crazy detective! What the hell do you want?"

"There was a dead man on your lawn at one o'clock this morning. What happened to him?"

Antheme plunked down on the arm of an overstuffed chair and gave Lane a hard, straight stare. "All right; I'll take your word there was a body on my lawn at one o'clock. But it wasn't there at three, when I came home."

Lane pounced on that like a cat. "What makes you so sure? Can you see in the dark?"

EMOTIONS chased each other across Antheme's face. Exasperation won. "For Crissakes," he said disgustedly. "How do you think I could see? I turned on a light!"

Before Lane could say anything, Antheme went on. "I always turn on a

light. Then I roll out the garden hose from the garage."

"You mean you water the lawn at three in the morning?" Lane asked incredulously.

Antheme threw up his hands. "Boy, you sure don't know anything about gardening! You water flowers at night and you'll get a crop of fungus, that's what you'll get! My wife turns it on in the morning; I roll it out for her because it's a long hose, and heavy."

He gave his wife a bitter look. "You sure did some job this morning!"

Her voice was pleasantly husky and her anger was in her words, rather than in her tone. "You and your lawn and your flowers. I can sit in this stuffy house alone until the fungus comes out of my ears, and you wouldn't give a damn."

Myra pushed the redhead's purse aside and sat down next to her on the couch. "That's a song every woman can sing, isn't it?" she said sympathetically. "But maybe you heard or saw something last night."

"I was asleep," Mrs. Antheme grunted. "I'm asleep when he gets home, and he's asleep when I get up. And he's saving his dough so he can buy his own restaurant and work all twenty-four hours a day."

"Too bad about you," Antheme snarled. There was a little ball of crumpled newspaper near his foot and he kicked it toward his wife. Myra bent and picked it up like a good housekeeper.

"Well," Lane shrugged, "I guess that's all."

"Can I go to work now?" Antheme asked. The detective nodded and Antheme stalked out. The door slammed shut behind him.

As soon as he was gone Mrs. Antheme got up. "Listen," she said in her husky voice, "I didn't want to say so while Gus was here, but I wasn't asleep at one o'clock. I couldn't sleep, so I sat around in the dark and smoked. But I didn't hear a thing."

"Yeah," Lane said. "Just a case of mistaken identity or something. Let's go."

Outside, he patted George on the shoulder. "Don't worry about it. People are always getting us out on false alarms."

"This is no false alarm. I know what I saw."

"Nah," Lane shook his head. "What you *think* you saw. Maybe you were drunk. Maybe you got hit in the head in a fight, or by falling down. Could even be a dog behind the bush, and in your condition you saw a man. But no murder. Forget it."

He drove them back to the station and watched them get into their own car. "Thanks for trying, anyway," he said in a bored voice.

"Listen," George pleaded, "I'm telling you—"

Lane turned his back on them and George got sore. "All right. We'll see what headquarters has to say about it!"

The detective's eyes were stormy as he whirled. He lost his easy manner. "You're asking for trouble, wise guy. Keep bothering us and you'll see. We don't like crackpots, and we know how to handle them."

Myra stuck out her jaw at him. "Oh, yeah?"

GEORGE put the car in gear and got away from there before she could say anything more. "No use yelling at him," he said. "It looks like I was wrong, that's all. What do you want them to do? You've got to admit he questioned the Anthemes thoroughly."

She sneered at him. "This morning you were so sure. Now it's the other way. Why? 'Cause he threatened

you?"

It was true but George wouldn't admit it. So he said, "Oh, bunk."

"Don't 'oh bunk' me," Myra told him. "You found a body and you know it. Now drive back to the Antheme place."

"What for? They don't know anything about it. You heard what they said."

"I don't have to believe them, do I? Why did she pour so much water on the lawn this morning?"

"Probably fed up with his flowers," George guessed.

Myra gave him a shot of feminine wisdom. "With him, you mean. If she weren't, she'd be happy to water that lawn with an eye dropper. And that's not what they were arguing about before we came in."

"And how do you deduce that, Mrs. Holmes?" George asked sweetly.

"Different things. The way her purse had been emptied all over the couch, for instance. I'd say it was more common than that. Either money or men, or both."

George grunted. "I wouldn't be surprised. She doesn't look like the kind who'd sit around by herself. And there are plenty of guys who'd be glad to keep her entertained."

"Like you, for instance?"

George laughed virtuously but otherwise disregarded her question. "You could be right about the men, though. Suppose she had company, and Antheme came home early and found him."

Myra finished for him. "So he hit him over the head and then dragged him across that precious lawn of his and dumped him behind the peony bush for anybody to find."

The way she said it, it sounded silly. "I guess not," George agreed. "Besides, he got home at three. He wouldn't lie about that. Too easy to check."

Myra nodded. "It's got to be more complicated than that."

They pulled to the curb a few doors from the Antheme home and Myra turned on the inside light. Then she opened her purse and removed a cosmetic pouch and dumped its contents into the purse proper. George saw a ball of newspaper in her purse.

"Why did you take that?" he asked. "And what's the pouch for?"

"Never you mind," Myra said mysteriously. "You just wait here for me."

HE WAITED while she got out of the car and walked ahead. Oblivious to the mud she was getting on her shoes she crossed the lawn and knelt behind the peony bush. He saw her grubbing about in the dirt, and when she returned to the car the pouch was full and fastened securely.

"I'll show those cops," she said as she settled back. George knew better than to ask more questions.

But they had not gone more than a block when Myra grabbed his arm. "Stop!"

He pulled to the curb and slid the car between a station wagon and a roadster which were parked there. "Now what?" he demanded.

Instead of answering she pointed toward a porch where a woman was standing. The porch light was on and they could see the woman clearly. But she wasn't doing anything, just standing and staring down the street as though she were waiting for someone.

"Don't you remember her?" Myra hissed in George's ear.

"Never saw her before in my life," he grunted.

"Sure you did. At the station."

He looked again and saw that Myra was right. "So what? What has she got to do with it?"

"Maybe nothing. But there's only one way to find out." As they got out of the car Myra whispered to him, "And let me do the talking."

The woman watched them come toward her, and they could see that her face was strained and afraid. George wondered how Myra was going to work it. He was surprised at the practised ease with which she opened the conversation.

"We were at the police station when you came in," she started.

The dark woman looked at her fearfully. "Yes?"

Myra nodded brightly. "We're private investigators, and we're working in this neighborhood. We thought perhaps we might be able to help you."

Hope made her voice high and fragile. "You can? You know about my husband?"

"Only what we heard you say at the station," Myra told her. "But if you'll tell us more we can sort of keep our eyes open, and if we get hold of something we'd let you know."

"You're very kind," the woman said. Thankfulness tempered her disappointment. "Won't you come in?"

They followed her inside and Myra introduced herself and George. The woman's name was Mary Verra and her husband's first name was Marco.

"He plays in the orchestra at Danceland Ballroom," she explained. "Usually he's through at midnight. But sometimes the fellows get together for a jam session afterward; that's why I didn't worry when he wasn't home by daylight."

There was a photograph on the mantle and she took it down and showed it to them. Marco Verra was a handsome man, with slick, oily hair and dark virile features.

Mrs. Verra kept talking nervously while they studied her husband's picture. "Finally I called some of the fellows he plays with and they said no, they went right home last night. One of them even gave Marco a ride to the bus. And that's the last they saw of him." She began to cry quietly.

MYRA put her arm around Mrs. Verra. "Don't cry. He'll turn up safe and sound."

"You really think so?"

George wondered why people always said that. There was only one possible answer you could give.

Myra gave it. "Sure. But tell me, Mrs. Verra, does your husband have any enemies that you know of?"

"That's what they asked me at the police station," Mary Verra said. "But he hasn't. Everybody liked Marco. He's quiet, nice. He never has trouble with anyone."

Then Myra asked the question George had been waiting for. "Do you know the Anthemes, Mrs. Verra?"

"Who?"

"They live down the street in the next block. Mrs. Antheme has red hair."

"I know who you mean, but I've never spoken to her or her husband. I'm sure Marco hasn't either. Why do you ask?"

Myra handled it nicely. "We've met them, and I just wondered if you were acquainted."

They all stood up then and Myra said, "If we run across anything we'll let you know at once. But it will probably turn out that he met an old friend and they got to talking."

Mrs. Verra nodded bravely, but when they left the tears were rolling down her cheeks again. George felt sorry for her.

"Do you think Verra could be the one I found?" he asked Myra uneasily as they drove away.

"I wouldn't be surprised."

George shook his head. "The whole thing doesn't make sense. That gorilla who slugged me was going the other way. Whether he killed someone or not he was anxious to get away from there. Why should he turn around and go back and cart the body away?"

"And if he didn't someone else did," Myra said.

"Why don't you forget it?" George begged. "You don't know what you might be getting into."

"You said that before," she reminded him. "If you don't want to clear your name, I do."

He gaped at her. "Clear my name? What am I accused of, being too drunk to see straight? I can stand that."

Myra turned up her nose. "You don't understand the principle involved."

"Sure I do. You're what they used to call a 'busybody.' What you need is a couple of kids to keep you occupied."

"You sound more intelligent when you're drunk," Myra told him. "Just drive home and let me handle this myself."

"Oh, sure. You'll handle it yourself until you get in a jam. Then you'll come yelling for George to help you out."

IN EXPECTATION of that eventuality he kept his eye on her the rest of the evening. But she seemed to have done all the fieldwork she was going to do that day. George's pride kept him from asking again what she had in the cosmetic pouch. It also made him refrain from peering over her shoulder to see what she was looking up in the classified directory.

After she had jotted down several numbers from the directory, Myra put the book away. Then she got out the ball of newspaper and spread it flat on the table before her. Its significance must have been immediately apparent to Myra, because she smiled triumphantly and put it back in her purse.

The next time George looked up from the book he was pretending to read, a yellow slip of paper that looked like a laundry ticket had made its appearance on the dining room table. That seemed to stump her; she had a puzzled frown, and several times she threw George a questioning glance which he ignored.

At last she broke down.

"George," she called sweetly. "Would you mind coming here a minute?"

He put down his book and went to her, trying to look uninterested. Myra showed him the slip, which had numbers penned on it.

"Where'd you get this?" George demanded.

Myra smiled complacently. "From Mrs. Antheme's purse. What is it?"

"It's a horse race receipt. Someone put twenty to win on number 127. You get one of these when you make a bet in a bookie joint."

"I should have known that without asking you." She pulled out the crumpled paper and showed it to him. It was the racing page. Without comment he went back to his book.

Not for long. "George!"

The book slapped shut. "What do you want now?"

"Suppose I wanted to bet on a horse race—"

"Let's suppose you don't. You've got enough bad habits without adding that one."

"I didn't mean it literally. What I wanted to ask was, how could I find a bookie?"

"Ask the nearest policeman." He ducked his head automatically, but

Myra hadn't thrown anything. She was too interested in extracting information.

"Is that all they do in those places, just take bets?" she called from the dining room.

"No. Usually they have a blackjack table and a crap game. And most of them have several poker games in the evening, besides the other two."

Myra seemed more than satisfied with his answer. Her head bobbed up and down several times as though George had furnished a logical conclusion to some line of thought she had been following.

"Got it all figured out now, haven't you?" he asked sarcastically.

Myra put the yellow slip in her purse along with the racing page and the cosmetic pouch. Then she gave George a long, mocking look. "Yes," she said, "all figured out."

Her answer brought George out of his chair, but before he could say a word she stopped him. "Save your questions, Georgie. I'm not going to tell you until I can prove it."

"Oh," he grunted. "First you decide what the answer is, and *then* you work the problem!"

"But of course. That's how men do it too, only they won't admit it."

Feebly, he told himself that there were two good reasons why he shouldn't argue the point. First, it was impossible to argue with a woman anyway; and second, for some crazy, subtle reason which was beyond his powers as a logician, it was possible that she was right. . . .

MORNING sunlight that was so bright that even burying his face in the pillow couldn't keep it out of his eyes forced George awake. The alarm clock, which was never set in the off season, told him it was nine o'clock. He wondered why Myra hadn't awakened him.

When he got downstairs she was at the phone and sounding elated. "That's wonderful! I'd heard about it somewhere but I wasn't sure it could really be done." There was a pause and then she said, "Yes, my husband will leave it on his way to the office."

She hung up and turned, and found George at her elbow. "Good morning, dear," she said brightly.

"I didn't know I was going to the office today," he told her. George supposed he really should, though, if only to give the girl an extra day off. There wasn't any work to do; his fall line was sold and it was too early for reorders. But there might be some letters that demanded a personal reply, or an out of town customer might happen in.

"I thought that maybe—" Myra began.

"All right, I'm going. What is it you want me to take?"

"This." She held out the bulging cosmetic pouch. "Just leave it at the Central Medical Laboratories, at 36 Madison Street. They'll know what to do with it."

Later, as he drove toward the office, curiosity made it difficult for him to keep his mind on traffic. What the devil could be in the pouch? At least three times, as he waited for lights to change, he almost opened it. But he held out; there was always the chance that he would get a peek at the contents when the man at the laboraories took it from him.

There was no man. It was a girl at a reception desk who took it. George told her his name and waited expectantly, but she only nodded and put the pouch in a paper envelope which had his name already typed on it. All he got out of her was a sweet smile with her

"thank you." It was infuriating.

Four days' mail made a larger pile on his desk than he had expected, and most of it did need his personal attention. One big account claimed their order hadn't been filled properly and what kind of a salesman was he anyway? A small town customer was coming to the city in a week and would appreciate it very much if George could get hold of some tickets to a musical comedy. A letter from the sales manager of his firm reminded George that his weren't the only customers who had to be taken care of.

There were others in a like vein and it was two o'clock by the time he was through answering them. Then he went down, bought a paper, and went into a restaurant for a late lunch. He sat down at the counter, unfolded the paper, took one look at the front page and got right up again.

"Forgot something," he flung back at the startled waitress as he ran for the door.

BACK in the office, he tried to call Myra. She wasn't home. He tried their neighbor, Mrs. Frain; sometimes Myra watched her baby when she had to do some shopping. It was no good. Myra wasn't there and she wasn't at any of her usual haunts.

At three o'clock she called George. Her voice was urgent but he cut her short. "Have you seen this afternoon's paper?" George demanded.

"No. Why?"

"The police found Marco Verra this morning! Fished his body out of the river. His skull was battered in."

She took it in stride. "I knew they'd find him sooner or later."

"You mean you knew he was dead?" George asked incredulously.

"But of course. I told you I had it all figured out, didn't I? The reason I sent that stuff to the laboratory was just to make absolutely sure."

Bewildered, George shook his head at the phone. "Listen, I've been trying for an hour to call you. Where have you been?"

"Where I am now: in a bookie joint. That's what I called to tell you. It's at Twelfth and Clark, above a cigar store."

George was startled. "Hey, that's only four or five blocks from where Verra lived! What are you doing there?"

"Waiting for the man who killed him, of course."

The clutch of fear tightened on George's heart. "Myra, listen to me. Get out of there as fast as you can. I'll meet you around the corner from the cigar store in ten minutes."

"Don't be silly," she told him. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Nobody here knows me, and besides—" Her voice broke off with a strangled gasp.

"Honey!" he yelled. "Myra! What's going on—" The receiver registered the click of disconnection and left him staring with horror.

Behind him the phone on the desk made noises as he ran for the door, and the operator's voice followed him and slowed his headlong dash. He should call the police; that was the thing to do. But it would take precious minutes to get the call through, and in the meantime—what was happening to Myra?

His mind rejected the question. It refused to consider any possibilities at all. He knew only that he had to get to Twelfth and Clark, and get there as fast as he could.

There wasn't time to run to the parking lot for his car; not when a cab was discharging a passenger right in front of the office building. George

dug into his pocket and pulled out all the money he had. Pushing the passenger aside roughly, he thrust the money at the driver.

"I'll pay his fare! Twelfth and Clark, and don't stop for lights!"

The cabbie took one look at the bills, snatched them from George with one hand and threw the car into gear with the other. George was hurled into the corner of the back seat as the cab leaped into traffic, and then everything became a mad whirl of shrieking pedestrians, cursing drivers and whistle-blowing cops.

"Fast enough?" the driver yelled back as the cab took a corner on two wheels.

IT WASN'T fast enough. It couldn't be. But eventually, after an age, they were there. The cigar store was on the southeast corner, and to its right was a doorway that led up to the single loft above it.

People were pouring out of that doorway, a fear crazed mob that broke and ran in all directions. George leaped from the cab and ran for the doorway. It was open but the stairs were clogged with men and women who came through a door at the top.

He grabbed one of them, a burly laborer, and was hurled back onto the sidewalk into the arms of a blue-coated policeman. "What's going on up there?" the cop shouted in his ear.

George shook his head. "I don't know. My wife's—"

He sickened as a scream that was unmistakably Myra's came down to them, but before he could move from the spot to which he was rooted there followed a fusillage of gunshots. There was a moment of silence and then a scream that was not Myra's this time, and again two quick shots.

Not more than two minutes had elapsed since George had arrived in the cab but already the doorway and the street were clear of people. The last straggler scooted around the corner as the cop ran for the door with George beside him.

They were halfway up the stairs when the figure lurched through the open doorway above them. It was a man, bent almost double, with his hands across his middle. And even in the half-light George could see the blood that poured past the clutching fingers.

Shock forced George's mouth agape as he recognized the thick gray black hair and the agonized, chunky body. Gus Antheme! But there was no answering gleam in Antheme's eyes as he suddenly crumpled and came rolling down toward them. George stepped aside to let the body go past him. There was no use stopping it.

Inside the loft, smoke still hung above the green covered blackjack table and swirled around the unshaded bulbs above the table that held the racing forms. A bench lay overturned beneath a row of wall sheets, and the sheet-writer had left a number unfinished as he ran. The big room had the look of violence and the feel of death.

Antheme's blood made a clear trail along one wall and he had left a bloody handprint on a sheet as he had groped his way past. Where the sheets ended there was a row of cashiers' cages strewn with greenbacks and yellow, red and orange slips. The shiny red drops led past the cages and into an office behind them.

The man with the low brow and crooked nose lay across the office threshold. Antheme's bullet had caught him in the chest and knocked him flat on his back, and he looked as ugly in death as he had in life. At his side was a plaited-leather blackjack. George stepped over him into the acrid smell of

gunsmoke.

ONE of the three phones on the desk rang shrilly but no one answered it. It didn't matter; the boss bookie wasn't interested in horse racing any more. He lay beside the desk with a thirty-eight automatic in his hand, and the blood was still running from his throat to puddle around him and stain his expensive gabardine slack suit an ugly wine color. It didn't seem right that his slick blond hair should be unruffled, but he looked the kind who would be meticulous about such things even in death.

Mrs. Antheme had taken it sitting down. She must have been the last to go because the trail of blood went past the blond man and was thick at her feet. She wore a green dress that was singed at the left breast; her husband had made sure he wouldn't miss.

But it was only for Myra that George had eyes. The rest of the scene he took in as he went toward her. She was in a leather chair in the far corner of the room, a white cloth around her chin and her hands and feet bound tightly before her. She looked as dead as the rest.

"Honey!" George gasped. Sweat stood in drops on his ashen features.

It wasn't his voice that roused her; it was the phone, still ringing insistently. Her eyes fluttered weakly and failed to focus. "Hello," she murmured. "What number did you want?"

George's heart skipped a couple of beats and settled back to a more normal rate. "Honey," he said again, "it's me. It's George. Are you all right?"

This time her eyes stayed open but they were still vague. "Sure, I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?" Then memory flooded back and her eyes were clouded with horror and fear.

George untied her hands and feet. Then he took her and held her close to him while she cried like a child. "Don't cry, dear," he told her. "Everything is okay now."

But she refused to open her eyes again and he had to pick her up and carry her out of the office. There were more police in the loft now, and detectives with hard, eager eyes. Sergeant Lane was among them. He didn't stop to ask questions as he went past them but George knew there would be plenty of those to come. When Lane came out of the office ten minutes later he headed straight for George and Myra.

"That cop says your wife was in there with those three stiffs when you got here," he said slowly. "What's it all about?"

"I don't know," George confessed. "I don't know any more about it than you do."

"Don't give me any of that," Lane warned him. "Last night you come with a cock and bull story about finding a dead man and today you're mixed up in a quadruple killing."

Myra's eyes flashed fire as she turned on the angular detective. "Is that so?" she demanded. "If you'd believed George yesterday those people in there wouldn't be dead now."

Lane didn't get angry. He made a calling motion with his fingers and said, "Come on; keep talking. You mean there *was* a body?"

"Certainly!" Myra snapped.

"Who?"

"Marco Verra!"

AT THE sound of the name, Lane straightened abruptly. "We found him in the river," he reminded Myra.

"But he was murdered on the Antheme lawn," Myra told him.

George interrupted. "Mrs. Verra said they didn't know Gus Antheme or

his wife."

"They didn't," Myra admitted. George gaped at her in frank bewilderment and Lane tried to cut in. She held up her hand and stopped him.

"I'd better explain it," she said. Lane gave her a sardonic smile and said, "You'd better."

"Well," Myra went on, "I knew most of this last night. Some I learned here today, but I'll tell it all together so it will be easier to understand. And I'll start at the beginning.

"In the first place, I was sure George hadn't made a mistake. But he had told me that he'd wiped his bloody hands on the grass. So to make doubly sure I pulled up a lot of grass and sent it to the laboratory to be tested. I'd heard that even repeated washings will leave a discoverable trace of blood."

Lane nodded. "That's true." He ran a hand through his hair. "All right; I'll admit I was wrong. So now we know why Mrs. Antheme soaked the lawn. But why should she want to cover up the murder? You yourself just said she didn't even know Verra!"

Myra nodded. "That was the crux of the whole problem. The only answer which would make sense was that her husband had killed Verra and that she was helping him dispose of the evidence. Or that she herself had done it."

"Wait a minute," George put in. "We ruled out Gus Antheme. He was at work at the time. And why should either of them kill an utter stranger?"

"The answer to that," Myra said, "I learned from Mrs. Verra. She told us that her husband played in an orchestra and that he usually came home one o'clock or a little earlier. Now, what kind of clothes do musicians usually wear?"

Both George and Lane stared at her uncomprehendingly. It was evident that neither of them could see what difference it made.

She supplied the answer herself. "Tuxedos. Isn't that right? And who else that we knew also wore one?"

"Good grief!" Lane exploded. "You mean to say that it was a case of mistaken identity? That the intended victim was Gus Antheme?"

"Give him a gold star and let him move up a seat," Myra said to George. "Now you can see the whole picture clearly. Here was Mrs. Antheme. It was obvious to me the minute I saw her and her husband together that she hated him. She was young, beautiful and she wanted excitement. Antheme let her sit home alone. To make matters worse he was stingy, although he probably made a lot of money."

"Some of those headwaiters make five hundred a week or more nowadays," Lane informed her.

MYRA nodded and went on. "At any rate, Mrs. Antheme was playing the horses. That's how she met that blond fellow in there. He owned this place and he was more her type. They fell for each other and he wanted her to leave Antheme.

"But she was greedy. She wanted the money she knew her husband had. And she knew that she'd never see a penny of it if she divorced him. So she decided to kill him and get all of it.

"Her boy friend supplied the actual killer—that man who knocked George out—the one with the broken nose and the scar on his face. But he wasn't very bright and he'd never seen Antheme, so he bungled the job and killed the wrong man.

"Then George came along and stumbled on the body. He made enough noise so Mrs. Antheme knew the body had been discovered. As soon as George left she came out, knowing something had gone wrong because her husband

wasn't due home for an hour.

"When she saw Verra she realized what had happened. But if she left him there her husband might get suspicious. At best, the police would certainly connect things up if Antheme were killed soon afterward. So she called her boy friend and he took Verra's body to the river and dumped it in.

"They almost got away with it. But I had a hunch. I knew that if she was playing the horses it was probably in a neighborhood bookie joint. The first man I asked directed me to this place and as soon as I saw the man with the broken nose I recognized him from George's description.

"Nobody here knew me, so I asked if I might use the phone and I called George, figuring he would relay it to the police. Just then Mrs. Antheme came in. She recognized me at once and realized what I was here for. Before I knew what was happening, almost, I was trussed up and had a gag stuffed in my mouth. I . . . I guess they were going to kill me.

"But they hadn't figured on Antheme. He was insanely jealous of his wife and he had a pretty good idea of what was going on. Today he followed her. He came in just as I worked the gag loose and was getting ready to let out a scream."

"You did scream once," George told her. "I heard it downstairs."

Myra had the frightened look in her eyes again, as though she were reliving the experience. She was shivering and her voice shook. But she kept talking.

"He had a gun. When that man pulled out his blackjack and came at him, Antheme shot him. Then the man behind the desk started to shoot and I could see the blood spurt from Antheme's stomach.

"But Antheme kept coming, although he was dying on his feet. One of his shots caught the blond man in the neck and he fell beside the desk.

"Then he went for his wife. I saw him put the gun against her and I heard her scream and then the gun went off. I . . . I guess that was when I fainted."

Lane nodded. "I don't blame you. Those things aren't very pleasant." He heaved a slow sigh. "Well, you did a pretty good job of deducting at that. You've got a perfect mind for a detective."

He was about to say more but they had to step aside for a couple of cops who were carrying out Mrs. Antheme's body. Myra couldn't help seeing it and her face went whiter than the tear stained powder on it. She looked like she was going to faint again.

Sergeant Lane smiled grimly. "But I wouldn't take it as a steady job if I were you. You haven't got the guts for it!"

EDDIE MEETS HIS FATE

By

W. B. CLAYTON

The forerunner of such men as Dillinger, Karpis and Nelson, played no less dangerous a game. . . .

THE guiding spirit of John Dillinger, Alvin Karpis, Dolores Delaney, Baby Face Nelson, and other Public Enemies was the little known Eddie Green. Smarter than the rest of them, he played an executive position—initiated and directed the crimes.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1900, Eddie Green was conditioned early for the criminal profession. At the age of seventeen he was sentenced to the House of Correction for six months on a charge of larceny. While there he was instructed further by the confirmed criminals in their "art."

Upon returning home to St. Paul, he put into practice the varied criminal techniques he had learned. In the beginning he made some mistakes. But after spending another period at the Minnesota State Penitentiary, he emerged with all the knowledge of the trade at his fingertips.

Accepted as a friend by a girl known as Ruth, who ran a tavern for criminals, he soon became acquainted with the most notorious, and after a while was allowed to participate in their activities. Ruth had received her training from the big man of the gangs, Dapper Dan Hogan. Hanging out at her tavern were the men of the two large gangs including Harry Sawyer, Frank Nash, Thomas Holden, Francis Kenting—all escaped prisoners from Leavenworth Penitentiary—and Vernon Miller, and almost all the members of the Karpis Baker gang. Next to Hogan, Sawyer held top position. Through Ruth, Eddie Green met Sawyer; and then through Ruth and Sawyer, he gradually met all the other important members of the gangs.

By the time the robbery of the Fairbury National Bank took place, Eddie Green was in the good graces of all the men and so was permitted to participate. During the robbery one of the men, Christman, was seriously wounded. Green, the newest member, was told to remain with him while the others took the money and fled. Through his effective handling of the situation into which he was pushed, Green gave striking evidence of his "talent" for criminology. He hurried Christman to the home of Vernon Miller, of Kansas City, and then found an underworld doctor who agreed to treat Christman. In a way his efforts were in vain because Christman died. But his efforts were enabling him to become quickly familiar with the intricacies of the underworld.

From the beginning Ruth and Eddie Green felt a strong attraction toward each other. Soon they married, and rented an apartment on Kedzie avenue in Chicago. To all outward appearances they were leading quiet and respectable lives. Their criminal friends were never permitted to congregate at their home or to arouse any commotion there. Alvin Karpis and Dolores Delany lived near the Greens and saw a great deal of them. But soon the Greens decided to move back to St. Paul. Even though many of the activities of the gang were directed by them and Karpis in Chicago, Harry Sawyer's home in St. Paul remained the headquarters of the gangs. Eddie Green wanted to be closer to Sawyer and act as the agent between the gangs and Sawyer. Back in St. Paul, Green gradually came into this position by making himself essential to the men of the gangs.

GREEN was not very smart, but the leaders of the gangs—Alvin Karpis, John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson and etc.—were of the lowest mentalities and so came to Green for direction. They respected him as an expert safe blower and bank robber though he seldom actively participated. They were aware that he knew all the ins and outs of the business, and so came to him when they were in a jam or when they needed guns, ammunition, or bullet-proof vests. Within four short years Green had risen to his high position, but unknown to him his sense of achievement was not to last much longer.

In March, 1933, John Dillinger escaped from Lake County Jail at Crown Point, Indiana. Stealing Sheriff Lillian Holley's car, he drove to St. Paul and sought refuge at Harry Sawyer's home. Sawyer contacted Green for advice—so the burden of Dillinger actually rested upon Green. Green was willing enough to help, but was concerned over Dillinger's nearness to him. He had recently committed a Federal offence by taking a stolen car across state lines, and was being searched for by the F. B. I. But he, as well as Dillinger, needed money, so he participated in the robbery of the Sioux Falls Security National Bank, and a week later in the robbery of the Mason City Iowa First National Bank. Afterwards, instead of moving on with their gains, the gang members, including Dillinger, settled down in the locality of Green. This disturbed Green who decided that the only thing left for him to do was to change his address. After renting an apartment in another location, the Greens were about to move into it when they heard that two gang members along with Dillinger were planning to move to the same locality. So they gave up their apartment to the three, and were most glad at their departure.

Not long afterwards Dillinger was wounded in a gun fight in the new apartment. His companions sought out Green at once. Told that Dillinger was lying wounded in a car near his apartment, Green knew that he had to act. First, he had Dillinger removed to the home of a gang member to receive medical attention. Second, he decided to remove all traces of Dillinger and his companion's occupancy from the apartment. Sending Alma Powell, another member of the gang, to the apartment to collect their belongings, he awaited results. But unknown to Green, Alma was arrested by the G men who were stationed in the apartment waiting for whoever might come. That night Green went to Alma's home to pick up the belongings, but to his great surprise instead of finding Alma there, he found the G men. While reaching for his gun, he was shot. He was taken to the Ancker Hospital in Minneapolis, and died there a week later.

Eddie Green was called "Eddie the Wise" by his friends. Perhaps he was wise in the sense that to outsiders he gave the appearance of being an ordinary family man. In the neighborhoods in which they lived, he and his wife were never regarded with suspicion. But his "wisdom" did not prevent him from being caught by the police and getting what he deserved. As a matter of fact he was the first of the members of his gang to meet his fate. The others found themselves caught in the strong web of the law shortly afterward.

Kilroy Was Here!

by LEONARD B. ROSBOROUGH

Everything pointed to Phillip Saxon as the murderer. But there was one piece missing from the puzzle: what was Kilroy doing at the time?

She saw the card first; not until it was in her hand did she see the wind-blown papers and the body on the floor

THE burp of the three o'clock time signal put a period to the newscaster's oratory pouring out of the radio on my office desk. A pause, a station identification, then a commercial: "Yaas, folks, Haystack cigarettes are the only cigarettes containing Vitamin Q—"

I sneered at the radio and snapped it off, wishing bad 'cess to the writers of those spiels where the speaker starts off with a braying Yaaas!—or makes his announcement, brays, then repeats it on the theory that the dopes didn't get it at the first telling.

Someone outside took hold of our doorknob. Marge Dayton, my secretary, stopped typing and put on her brightest look.

I grinned and jeered at her, "Be still, my little heart. He comes, he comes."

The door opened and Marge's face went blank. It wasn't Phil Saxon, the light of her life; it was Lillian Roth, the tall redhead from James B. Vickers' office, a few doors down and across the hall—a bold wench who would have been called "fast" if she'd lived back in the early days of this century. Marge's expression turned chilly; then curiosity melted the frost in her eyes. Lillian was looking anything but bold. Behind the heavy make-up her skin was chalky. She hung onto the knob with one hand and braced the other against the door frame.

Marge asked, "Something wrong—Miss Roth?"

Lillian worked her jaw a few times and finally got some words out: "Jim . . . Mr. Vickers . . . has been . . . shot."

She started to back out, and I called her, "Did you phone the police?"

She shook her head. "No, I came straight to you—you're a detective."

"Call 'em," I said as the door closed. "Probably didn't hear me," I told Marge, and reached for the phone.

"Wait, Slim." Marge's voice was low and husky. "Don't call the police—just yet."

"Oh," I said. "You're thinking of Phil Saxon?"

She nodded. "Are you sure you saw Phil go into Vickers' office?"

"Nobody else. What would he be seeing Vickers about?"

"Vickers holds Phil's note—for a thousand dollars. It's due about now." She went on with a kind of gentle ferocity: "But Phil didn't kill him—you know he didn't. So you needn't tell the cops he was there. That—that woman didn't see him."

"She was too rattled to remember anything. If she did see him, it'll come back to her when she collects her wits."

"If any," Marge retorted cattily.

I got up and said, "Let's see how things stand."

"Wait," Marge objected. "Let me think."

I sat down again and we skimmed over the events of the past quarter of an hour . . .

I'D BEEN pacing the floor, stewing about the heat while Marge calmly typed. Finally she had stopped work, looked up at me and said, "Slim, if you'll ditch the caged-tiger act and sit down, you won't be so hot."

"If I felt as cool as you look!" I retorted with envy.

In her filmy summer outfit, she seemed as cool as a breeze off Lake Michigan—a cunning little package with fluffy brown hair, clear gray eyes and a skin you'd love to touch if you were in the skin-touching business. Nothing personal between us, understand; business and babes don't mix. Gals either work *for* you or they work you. She felt the same way. Besides, she was already optioned to this Philip Saxon, a decent young guy who had an office in the next building to the east of ours.

"It's largely a state of mind," she answered.

"Oh, sure. Well, I think I'll call it a day."

She glanced at the Telechron on the wall. "At a quarter to three?" She said it as if I'd suggested blowing up the post-office. "Turn on the radio and forget the heat." She went on typing.

My office is on the fifteenth floor, one of a row on the west side of the building, with two windows facing in that direction. Opposite them is the door opening into the central corridor which runs the length of the building. The door was ajar, and a languid breeze oozed in through our windows and wended its weary way out into the hall.

I took Marge's advice and tuned in a musical program. Then I ambled over to the door, opened it wider and stood idly studying the dignified gold lettering on the glass: *Stephen A. Chance, Investigations*. I'm Stephen, six-foot-two-inches high and short in the other dimensions. That fact, combined with the family name, was a natural for the primitive humorists; so Slim took over and Stephen was forgotten.

Back at my desk, I sat down, put my feet on it and gave ear to the radio. The heat seemed to have affected the wall clock, too; the minute hand was even more languid than our anemic western breeze. A girl on the radio was singing *Sweet and Low*. There was a line about wind of the western sea and a little later an exhortation to blow him again to me. I made a corny joke about

this wind being too feeble to blow anybody to anybody.

Marge ignored the crack. Without stopping her flickering fingers, she said, "Watching the clock will only make it seem longer. Do something. Cut out paper dolls. Anything."

"Margie, my little mind reader," I said, "you inspire me."

When the force of destiny requires it, I can do a fair job of typing, and we had a spare typewriter on a stand. I pulled it to me. The minute hand of the wall clock was almost at the 46 mark. I waited until it was on dead center and started typing. *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.* It's the only tune in many a typewriter mechanic's repertoire, and an amateur can pile up a lot of words writing it over and over. At the end of the minute I had put down six and a half lines—a hundred and four words. I immediately started to break that record.

MARGE stopped her work, threw the nice boy a smile of approval at having found something to amuse himself, took up the phone and dialed a number. She asked primly for Mr. Saxon, then said even more primly, "No thank you. I'll call later." She hung up, wrinkled her nose and said, "That Adrain Kilroy! Why does Phil share offices with him?"

"Why not?" I asked, still batting the keys. "What's wrong with Kilroy?"

"He's a wolf." Her voice was full of polite disgust. "He used to—carry the torch for that—that redhead across the hall, Lillian Roth. Still does, for that matter. They're two of a kind."

"That fireball in Vickers' office? Vickers beat his time, eh?"

"That's the gossip." Marge's machine must have been surprised at her vigor when she attacked it again.

As I finished the second minute—seven full lines this time—the languid breeze developed into a sudden strong gust that picked up loose papers and sent them flying. One sailed into the hall, and I dashed out after it. When I came back, Marge was picking up the others. The wind died away as suddenly as it had sprung up.

I settled down again and listened to the music until the 2:55 newscast came on—and with it another rush of air. But this was coming in from the hall, and it was cool—right off Lake Michigan—one of those abrupt shifts from west to northeast which sometimes give Chicago quick relief from sizzling heat.

A little reveling in the coolness gave me a new lease on life, and I decided to run another minute marathon, urging all good men to do right by the party. Seven full lines proved to be my limit. By the time the minute was up, the breeze was a little too strong for comfort. I got up to close the door and looked out into the hall. That was when I saw Phil Saxon going into the office of James B. Vickers, the loan agent.

"Marge," I said, "maybe the singer on the radio had something, after all."

She looked blank and asked, "What?"

"About the wind of the western sea blowing him again to me."

"But the wind has reversed—that should blow him away."

"East wind, west wind—what does it matter? I just saw your heart throb going into Vickers' loan joint. Probably going to borrow a couple of bucks and take you out to paint the town tonight."

I closed the door and left the transom open. The thermometer was down from ninety to seventy.

The radio newsboy was coming into

the home stretch. Marge's mill was humming, but I sensed an air of expectancy about her, as if she were hoping Phil Saxon would just happen to wander in.

Then—the yaaas-man advertising Haystack cigarettes, the hand on our doorknob, Marge's bright expectant look, the opening door. And Lillian Roth announcing the murder of her employer, Mr. James B. Vickers . . .

. . . Marge and I skimmed over that picture fast. I stood up and said, "I'll go in and look around." Marge followed me.

VICKERS' two-room suite, in the row of offices on the other side of the central corridor, had two doors. The one to his private office was locked, but the transom was open and cool air poured through it. A few steps farther south we went through the other door into the front office, a narrow room extending across to the window in the east wall of the building. It was this public entrance through which I'd seen Phil Saxon disappear shortly before.

A low railing cut off the front part of the room to form a reception space, with a long wooden bench for callers. Lillian Roth's desk stood just beyond the railing, facing the door. She was sitting slumped over it with her face buried in her arms.

She raised her head. Her face had the same strained look as it did when she came into my office a minute or two earlier. She gestured in the direction of Vickers' room. "He's . . . in there," she said in a strangled voice, "on the floor . . . by his desk. I was out of the office . . . from 2:45 till three—my regular rest period."

Heaven, in the guise of a state law, protects the working girl by allowing her two fifteen-minute rest periods per day—morning and afternoon. Most of the girls in the building took advantage of it. The babes can dance six hours straight without catching their breath, but a solid stretch of four hours of nice light office work is too much for them.

I took a glance around, waiting for Lillian to unload whatever else she might have on her chest, and saw a business card on the floor in the narrow space between her desk and the railing.

Lillian went on, speaking like one half awake, "He was all right when I went out, working at his desk. When I got back . . . he was dead." Again she buried her face in her arms.

I said to Marge, "You'd better stay out here. It might be pretty bad."

"All right, Slim," she answered, and sat down on the visitors' bench. This surprised me a little, because she's as curious as a cat and usually wants to be in on everything.

I went through the swinging gate in the railing and started back along the partition toward the door into Vickers' private office. Besides Lillian's desk, the reception room contained some filing cases and a large double wardrobe, one section of which housed a wash basin and mirror.

Several letters were scattered over the carpet between Lillian's desk and the east window. They'd evidently been blown off the desk by the sudden gust of wind and she had been so shocked at finding the corpse that she'd forgotten to pick them up.

I continued on to the door in the partition and stepped into Vickers' office. Its two windows looked out across a narrow court which separated it from the building to the east. The lower sash of each window was raised.

VICKER'S desk faced in the same direction as his secretary's, toward

the central hall, so that his back would be toward the windows when he was at work, and his left side toward the spot where I was standing. Now he was lying on his belly with his head toward me, his arms crooked so that both hands were under his chest. The left side of his face was bloody. Several papers were scattered over the floor between the desk and the windows. One small memorandum was lying on the body.

My first thought was that Vickers had heard the killer and started to swivel around in his chair at the moment the shot was fired—probably from about where I now stood; then, as the chair swung around, he'd pitched out of it onto the floor. The position of his chair and body supported this theory.

I walked over to the body. The hole in the left temple was terrific—too large, it seemed to me, to be made even by a .45 caliber bullet, the largest size fired by any modern hand gun. A wound like that would cause quick death, and the comparatively small loss of blood showed that he'd died instantly.

I stepped back to the partition door and looked out at Lillian Roth. She still had her head bowed on the desk. Marge wasn't in sight. I strode to the railing gate and looked for the business card which I'd noticed lying between the desk and railing. It was gone, and I now understood why Marge had been so willing to wait on the bench; she'd spotted the card, suspected whose it was, and had grabbed the chance to get rid of it.

"Where's Miss Dayton?" I asked Lillian.

She lifted her head long enough to mumble, "I don't know. She went out —probably to the rest room."

The card went with her, I felt sure; and I could make a good guess whose name was on it. I went into the hall. She was just coming around the corner from the area where the stairs and elevators were located. Her breathing was faster than normal when she came up to me, as if she'd been running up the stairs.

"So you got the card," I said in a low tone.

"What card?"

"Don't stall. It was Phil Saxon's, and you went to warn him."

She flushed, hesitated, then said defiantly, "So I did. What of it? Phil didn't kill Vickers—didn't even know he was dead."

"Oh, sure," I jeered. "How'd you know so much? Had a chat with him. How'd you know where to look?—and don't tell me the old gag about the farmer who figgered out where he'd go if he was a mule, and went there and found his lost jassack."

"You're not funny," Marge retorted hotly. "Phil has a customer on the floor below. It would be natural for him to stop there while he was in the building. He was waiting in the reception room down stairs."

"So you got him out into the hall and warned him away."

"I told him what happened; he didn't know anything about it, and I didn't want him walking in here unprepared. I'll show you the card, then I'm putting it back where I found it."

"How come?'

"Phil's coming back, and it will be the best proof he didn't kill Vickers. He wouldn't have done that and then left his card."

That seemed to make sense, but I answered, "Unless he dropped it by accident."

SHE took the card from her purse. Scribbled on it in Phil's handwriting was the notation, *Back later.* "He didn't write that by accident." She

hesitated. "Phil recalled hearing the elevator gates open just as he started down the stairs after leaving Vickers' office. We decided it was probably Lil Roth coming back. She might have seen him and forgotten it in the shock of finding Vickers' body. The card on the floor would prove he had nothing to hide."

"Or," I said with emphasis, "the cops may decide it was a plant, to give that very impression. That reminds me—I haven't called them, and I can't put it off much longer. If they squawk, I can explain this little delay was due to a misunderstanding—I thought Lillian phoned them, and she thought I did. But I want to take another look around first."

We went back into the office and found Lillian Roth with her face still buried in her arms on the desk. It looked as if she intended to spend the rest of her life like that.

Marge dropped Phil's card to the floor between Lillian's desk and the railing where she'd found it, and followed me through the railing gate and on to the door of Vickers' private office. She stopped when we got just inside his room and looked out through the east windows at the neighboring building, across the court. The windows over there were hung with Venetian blinds, most of them down, with the slats turned to a horizontal position. This shut out the hot afternoon sunlight, but allowed the breeze to blow through. The two windows directly opposite belonged to the suite occupied by Phil Saxon and Adrain Kilroy.

Marge's thoughts were still pursuing the redhead. "The gossip is that Vickers kept up Lil Roth's apartment," she whispered. "Maybe he was getting tired of her."

"A possible motive, if true, but I don't think she'd have the nerve to knock him off here. Has it occurred to you that we didn't hear a shot?"

"Of course, and I've been wondering about that. Maybe she used a gun with a silencer. She may have it in her desk now; she's been hanging over it ever since we came in."

"Wishful thinking, my pet. She'd know it would be found by the police. You've been reading too many detective yarns where silencers do impossible things. You can't use one to advantage on a revolver, and it's not too reliable on an automatic. On a rifle or single shot pistol, yes; but it's illegal to sell 'em, and she wouldn't be mechanic enough to make her own." I looked her straight in the eyes. "Anyhow, it's a good subject to avoid."

"Why?"

"Because Phil Saxon, among other things, sells a line of silencing devices for industrial engines. He'd be more familiar with them than anyone."

"Well, then, a hammer," Marge said abruptly. "One of the slim, long-nosed kind. That—that Roth hussy would be husky enough to swing one."

"Kid, you've got imagination. What brought that up?"

Marge looked toward the door into the reception room. "There's a hammer like that in the cabinet under the wash basin."

"I saw it," I confessed, "but that angle didn't occur to me. You're sharp today, Marge. It's a thousand-to-one shot, but if it's the murder weapon, the chemists at headquarters should find traces of blood, no matter how much it's been washed. . . . Before I call the cops, I'm going to look into that safe."

THE safe door was ajar. I nudged it farther open with my elbow and saw a metal cash box in one of the pigeon holes. Covering my hand with a handkerchief, I opened it. There was a small amount of cash in it.

Then in another compartment I saw a pistol. Still using the kerchief, I lifted it out. It was a long muzzle-loading smooth-bore gun of huge caliber—single-shot, of course. A ball from it would make a hole about like the one in Vickers' temple. The barrel was nearly a foot long, the entire length close to eighteen inches. It was undoubtedly old, although not a flint lock, but the cap lock type, fired by means of a percussion cap on a hollow nipple under the hammer.

It was well made, and my first thought was that it was a dueling pistol, although it had none of the fancy engraving or filigree work so often used to decorate weapons of that type. Then I saw, stamped in the metal, the words: Harper's Ferry—1842. So it was a military pistol manufactured at the government arsenal at that place.

"There," Marge whispered. "A silencer would work on that."

There was no percussion cap on the nipple, no charge in the barrel, no smell of burnt powder about it.

Marge said, "She could have cleaned it to get rid of the smell."

I shrugged. Why argue with a woman? Then I raised my voice so the girl in the outer office could hear and said, "It's funny the cops haven't come." I went to the partition door. "Miss Roth, did you call the police?"

She sat up and turned. "Why, no. I thought you did."

"I told you as you left my office . . . Oh, well, I'll do it."

MARGE and I were waiting in the reception room when the law arrived, led by Detective Lieutenant Hodge, a veteran as matter-of-fact and unsentimental as his name. There was a younger dick, a harness bull, photographer, fingerprint men, and fat little George Poole from the coroner's office.

Hodge said to me, "Hello, Chance. Where is it?"

"In there." I gestured with my thumb.

"Layin' 'em right on your doorstep, eh?" Hodge commented. He glanced around, spotted the card on the floor and picked it up, looked at the face of it, at the back, and finally dropped it in his pocket without comment.

"Come with us, miss," he said to Lillian Roth.

The bull sat down on the bench and the rest of us followed Hodge into Vickers' private office. While Poole satisfied himself that Vickers hadn't a spark of life left in him, Hodge looked around. He spotted the pistol in the safe, walked back and said to George Poole, "That's a big wound, George. What do you think made it?"

"Too big for any modern gun," Poole answered. "An old-timer, maybe—or some sort of bludgeon with a spike on it."

That was all the cue Marge needed. "There's a hammer out there in the cabinet under the wash basin," she told him.

Poole went out and inspected it, came back and said, "Might be. As soon as you've got your prints and pictures, Hodge, I'll probe the wound."

We moved to the outer office to give the photog and print men room to work. I told Hodge what we knew, leaving out any mention of my seeing Phil Saxon entering the office, and Marge's trip to warn him. Lillian told her story: Vickers was alive when she left, dead when she returned fifteen minutes later.

She was looking sick by now, and asked for a short leave of absence. Hodge hesitated, decided he'd better consent, and nodded at the young dick. "See that she comes back."

The dick gave him a wild look.

"Hell, son," Hodge grumbled, "you

don't have to hold her hand. Just wait in the hall outside the rest room door. When you bring her back, you can return to headquarters."

The youngster said, "Yessir," and followed Lillian out. Hodge nearly forgot himself; he almost smiled. "College man," he commented, pleasantly contemptuous.

The photog came out to go over the front office. Hodge took the rest of us, except the bull, back into Vickers' room. We stood around while the finger print boys finished their work. Their last job was to take the victim's prints. Hodge turned the body over for them, and let out a grunt. There was a folded slip of paper in one of Vickers' hands. Hodge compared the paper with Phil Saxon's card. "Promissory note," he muttered, "for a thousand dollars—signed by Philip Saxon and due today. We must talk to Mr. Saxon!"

I GAVE Marge a sidelong look. Fear lurked in her eyes, but she was keeping a grip on herself.

The print men got a record of Vickrs' fingers and went out to the front office. We heard the outside door open, a mutter of words, and the cop came in with Phil Saxon—a good looking ruddy-faced lad in his middle twenties—not one you pick as a killer. His questioning eyes took in the group, and widened when he saw the body. "What's wrong with him?" he asked sharply.

Not bad acting, I thought.

"Murdered," Hodge told him. "Know anything about it?"

"No, of course not."

Lillian came back into the office. She stared at Phil. "You . . . it was you I saw going down the stairs."

Hodge jerked his head around at her. "You saw him?"

Lillian gulped and nodded. "As I got off the elevator, coming back to the office, I saw a man go through the stairway door—dressed the same, with a briefcase like his."

Marge looked at me and said loud enough for all to hear, "She didn't mention that before. I think she just made it up—to turn suspicion from herself."

Lillian blazed back at her, "Damn you, I saw him!"

"And forgot about it?" Hodge asked mildly.

"Yes. When I saw Jim—dead—I couldn't think of anything else—until I saw Mr. Saxon. That brought it back to me."

Marge gave her a contemptuous smile. She knew, of course, that Phil's visit to the office would come out eventually, but she wasn't missing a chance to turn suspicion away from him.

Lillian Roth glared at her. "Don't hint I've anything to hide. Why should I"—her voice quavered—"kill him?"

There was an angry sparkle in Marg'e eyes, but she answered quietly, "I don't know, unless he was ditching you . . . you tramp!"

That, coming from demure little Marge, made me catch my breath. Phil Saxon gaped at her. Fat little George Poole goggled with surprise, then his eyes twinkled. "Ladies, please!" he said in mock horror. "Fortunately there are no sailors present."

Even Lillian Roth was momentarily paralyzed, but she snapped out of it and started for Marge. Hodge stepped in.

"Any more of that kind of talk from either of you, and I'll run you in," he told them. He eyed Marge. "Miss Dayton, it seems to me you're making a lot of fuss over nothing. Nobody's charged Saxon with anything—yet."

Marge saw she'd overplayed her hand. "Well," she said meekly, "It seemed strange she didn't mention any-

one, then picked the first person who came along."

Hodge said, "Huh!" and asked Phil Saxon, "Were you in this office?"

"Sure." Phil jerked his head at the Roth girl. "She wasn't here then, so I spoke into that intercommunication box on her desk; it connects with the one on Vickers' desk. There wasn't any answer, so I supposed he'd gone out, too. I waited a minute or so, then decided I'd see another customer first and come back—"

"I found your card," Hodge said. "What was your business with Vickers?" He seemed favorably impressed when Phil said it was about the note, and put another question: "Who was the customer you saw?"

"The Carol Engineering Company on the floor below. I had to wait to see the buyer. Then I came back here."

HODGE took Phil Saxon's briefcase, pulled out papers and glanced through them. As he replaced them and handed the case back, he remarked casually, "You sell assorted lines—including silencers for industrial use."

Phil looked at him warily and nodded.

More questions brought out the statement that Phil had been with a certain buyer at 2:45, the time Lillian Roth reported she had last seen Vickers alive. He'd left there in time to get back to his office at about ten minute to three. The buyer, called on the phone, confirmed this. Adrain Kilroy's name came up. Hodge phoned him an urgent invitation to come over. He was there in a matter of minutes.

Kilroy was obviously the go-getter salesman type, well groomed and confident. He came in plainly curious about the summons from the police. He spotted the sheeted body at once, shot a glance around the group, then asked Hodge, "What's up? Is that . . . Vickers?"

Hodge said it was and gave him the picture. Kilroy guessed that Phil Saxon had got back to their joint office about 2:50.

"Slim," Marge said to me, "it was exactly 2:45 when you threatened to go home on account of the heat. Soon after that I phoned Phil's office—"

"Was that you?" Kilroy broke in. "Why didn't you say so? Phil came in about five minutes later."

I said to Marge, "You phoned at 2:47. I'd just finished my first minute-marathon on the typewriter and started on the second."

When that was explained to Hodge, he pondered and said, "That would put Saxon back at his office at around 2:52."

"Then," Kilroy went on, "I went to a neighboring office to borrow a stenographer. Our girl's on vacation."

"How long were you gone?" Hodge asked.

"Say a couple of minutes. Phil left immediately after I returned with the borrowed steno."

Marge smiled at Phil. She seemed to think the timetable put him in the clear. It would give him only a minute or two in Vickers' office. We already knew that, of course, but this proved it to the police. Time enough for a murder if he'd come prepared for it —but hardly time enough to develop a quarrel and work up a murderous rage.

She turned the smile on Hodge. "Lieutenant, are you going to check Mr. Kilroy's movements?"

Kilroy laughed. Hodge chuckled and answered, "We've pretty well covered him up to about six minutes before three—"

Kilroy cut in, "The borrowed stenographer can alibi me from then on until just before you phoned me, Lieutenant."

Hodge said to George Poole, "See if there's a slug in the victim's head. The rest of you come to the front office. I'm going down to the Carol Engineering Company."

MARGE and Phil Saxon exchanged startled glances as we went out to the reception room. The photog and print men were gone. Hodge went out. Lillian Roth dropped into her chair, Marge and Phil and Kilroy took the visitor's bench, and I stood around passing aimless remarks with the cop on guard. Marge and Phil were trying to look unconcerned, but I knew they were worried.

Hodge wasn't gone long. He came in with his coat buttoned and a bulge under it. He said to Phil, "Well, Saxon, your story checks."

Marge and Phil exchanged smiles of relief.

Hodge reached inside his coat and pulled out the paper-wrapped package which had caused the bulge. He pulled the paper open and revealed a pistol which was a dead ringer for the one in Vickers' safe.

Marge sucked in a sharp breath. Phil's face went blank. Adrain Kilroy's sharp glance went from the pistol to them.

Hodge said with cold deliberation, "I found this tucked under the cushion's of that divan in Carol's waiting room, nicely tied with string. Sorry I had to spoil your package to learn what was in it."

At that moment Doc Poole came from the inner office carrying a round lead ball between his finger tips. He looked at the gun, at the ball, and said to Hodge, "Looks like this is it." Then to Marge, "This seems to rule out the hammer, Miss."

"All right," Phil Saxon said with a touch of defiance, "I had the gun in my briefcase. I was going to sell it to Vickers. But I didn't kill him; didn't even see him."

"And you didn't even know Vickers had been killed until you came back," Hodge jeered. "Then why did you hide this gun under the cushions?"

Phil hesitated as Hodge glared at him.

Marge sprang to her feet. "I'll tell you why. When I learned Vickers had been killed, I knew Phil had been here —I saw his card. I knew he wasn't guilty and I didn't want him to walk in here unprepared. So I went out and met him—"

"And told him to hide the gun," Hodge interrupted.

"No," Phil said sharply. "She didn't know I had it—not until she met me downstairs. I decided it would look like the devil if it was found in my briefcase—"

"It would indeed," Hodge said, "especially since it smells of burnt powder, and there's an exploded percussion cap still on the nipple under the hammer!"

That staggered Phil and Marge. Phil cried out, "There couldn't be."

HODGE eased the hammer up enough to show the cap on the nipple of the gun. Phil dropped to the bench, a wild look in his eyes. "But if I'd shot him, it would have been heard all over this floor."

Hodge answered drily, "A silencer on a gun of this type would muffle the sound quite a lot."

"Where's the silencer?" Marge flared at him.

Hodge ignored the question. He didn't turn his eyes from Phil Saxon's face.

Phil went on doggedly, "I brought that gun from home yesterday, wrapped and tied as you found it, and put it in

my briefcase and left it in my desk. It wasn't loaded then, and I haven't had the briefcase in my hands since—until I was ready to start over here today."

"What did you expect Vickers to give you for the pistol?"

"My note," Phil said.

Hodge opened his eyes wide. "A thousand dollars for that old junk?"

Phil Saxon looked at Kilroy and Hodge followed his glance.

"Junk hell," Kilroy said. "It's a valuable old gun."

"Oh, so you knew about it?"

"Sure. I told Phil to hold out for a thousand."

"Maybe Vickers couldn't see it at a thousand," Hodge answered. "Saxon, could you have paid cash on your note if he'd demanded it?"

Kilroy spoke again: "Vickers would have jumped at the chance to get this gun. There's probably not another in existence, except the one Vickers already owned."

"Yeah?" Hodge looked interested.

"That's a fact," Kilroy said positively. "It's a Harper's Ferry Model 1832, the first cap lock pistol ever made in a government arsenal. There's no record of it except a brief mention in some government document—you can't find any pictures or description of it anywhere. They went back to flint locks in 1836 and didn't make any more cap locks until 1842."

Hodge said, "You seem to know what you're talking about."

"I do. I'm something of a gun crank, but I couldn't afford an expensive piece like this. It's a .69 caliber, firing a one-ounce ball—same bore as a sixteen-gauge shotgun. The government made some of that caliber in 1814 and 1818. They obviously took another flyer in 1832; probably made only a few and decided they were too heavy. Before that, and for a long time after, they ranged from .50 to .58 caliber—mostly around .54 and .55—"

"Okay," Hodge cut him off. "Saxon, did you have a thousand dollars to take up your note if Vickers demanded it?"

Phil Saxon reddened. "No—that is, not all of it—not right now."

"I thought so. We'll have to hold you on suspicion of murder."

Phil of course objected and Kilroy backed him up. Hodge was a patient man, but I knew the argument wouldn't last long, and Hodge would win it. I ducked out.

KILROY would have left their office door unlocked, I surmised, so that the borrowed stenographer could return his letters when she finished them. My guess was correct.

I went in and threw on the snap lock to avoid interruption while I looked around.

The suite consisted of a reception room with a desk and some chairs, and the two offices opening off it. I glanced into Kilroy's office first. It had a rug and the usual layout of furniture, and there was a large sample trunk in one corner.

Then I went into Phil Saxon's quarters and straight across to the window. The Venetian blinds were down, with the slats set in a horizontal position. By standing close I could look between them and see into Vickers' private office across the narrow court between the two buildings. Phil's lower window sash was raised only a little way. I squatted down to bring my eyes in line with the opening under it.

Vickers' private office was unoccupied. They'd cleared out by now, no doubt, taking Phil with them and releasing the others. The policeman was probably still on watch in the front office, although I had no clear view of

it.

One of the things I was looking for was in plain sight—a flaring smudge across the top of one of the slats and a similar one on the lower surface of the slat above it—made by the blast of a gun fired between the two—a gun using old-style black powder. It certainly looked as though Jim Vickers' assassin had fired from this office—not as Vickers sat facing his desk, but after he had swung around in his swivel chair. I wondered what Marge would think if she were here to see those telltale stains.

I turned from the window and looked over the room. It was furnished about the same as Kilroy's, including a double cabinet like the one in the Vickers' suite. The buildings were twins, owned by the same syndicate, and furnished very much alike. One section of Saxon's cabinet housed a wash basin and mirror, the other serving as a wardrobe.

Under the wash basin was a metal waste basket containing soiled towels. I dug into them, and my eyes didn't pop when one turned up that was badly blackened and scorched, because I wasn't greatly surprised. It had obviously been used to muffle the report of a black-powder gun. I carried it to the window to examine it.

The quick, sharp click of heels in the corridor outside brought me back to earth. The borrowed stenographer, I thought, returning with Kilroy's letters. If she expected to find the door unlocked, she was due for a surprise. But I got the surprise when I heard a key pushed into the lock.

I dropped the towel behind the radiator under the window and ducked into the wardrobe, hunched down under the hat shelf and pulled the door shut. There was a small square grill in the door which gave a view of part of the room. It was cramped and hot in there, and a raincoat hanging on the crossbar tried to be chummy.

The knob of the office door turned, there was a pause, then I heard the visitor enter the anteroom and go on into Kilroy's room. It wasn't long until she came out of there and marched into Phil's, and I got my first sight of her. It was Marge Dayton.

SHE went directly to the window and repeated my performance. When she bent down to examine the lower portion of the blind, her roving eyes stopped, and I knew she had found the smudges on the slats. It seemed I wasn't the only one in our outfit who had bright ideas. She looked worried, but mixed with it was something else—a sort of grim determination.

She found the scorched towel and pulled it from behind the radiator. She was staring at it when someone else came to the outside door, and she dropped it hastily. Part of it went down behind the radiator, but one end draped over it. There was a pecking on the door glass, and Marge walked toward it and out of my line of vision. I heard the door open and a voice say "Hello." Marge hello-ed back, brightly. The voice said, "Mr. Kilroy's letters; I'll leave them on his desk." That would be the borrowed stenog.

Marge returned and stood near the window, waiting for the girl to leave. The stenographer came back from Kilroy's office and at the same time I heard another key thrust into the lock. There was a polite exchange of impersonal greetings as the door opened.

Marge swung around, wide-eyed, and I heard the door close behind the departing stenographer.

"Well!" It was Lillian Roth speaking. "Still covering up for the boy friend?" She came on in and saw the

blackened cloth draped over the radiator. "What happened to it?"

"Powder burns—" Marge began, but stopped short.

Lillian's heavily painted lips compressed. "So that's how Saxon worked it; he shot Jim and used this to muffle the sound. You were going to lose it for him—"

She stopped as she heard the outer door open. It was developing into a parade.

"Lil!" Adrain Kilroy this time. "And Miss Dayton; what are you doing here?"

"She's alibi-ing for her killer sweetheart," Lillian said spitefully. "There's what Phil Saxon used as a silencer when he shot Jim Vickers. She was getting rid of it for him. I followed her here."

"Why would she bring the 'silencer' here?" Kilroy asked.

"There must be something else in this office she wanted to get rid of—"

"If Phil shot Jim Vickers," Marge asked, "why didn't he take the note?"

"Phil Saxon went there, knowing Jim wouldn't take the gun, but would demand cash, which Saxon couldn't pay. He knew I'd be out only fifteen minutes; he had to work fast, so he shot without warning—"

"And left without the note?" Marge jeered. "Why?"

"Because he didn't have time to find it. Jim had it folded in his hand, and fell on top of it."

Lillian looked at Kilroy. He shook his head uncertainly. Her eyes narrowed. "Are you trying to alibi Saxon, too?"

"Of course not. I don't believe Saxon killed Vickers."

"So you're working together on this. We'll see what the police think." Lillian divided a glare between Marge and Kilroy and marched out.

KILROY shrugged and looked thoughtfully at the blackened towel. His eyes came up to the lower part of the Venetian blind and stopped there. His face turned grave and he spoke slowly, as if he couldn't believe what he was saying: "It looks like a powder smudge—as if a gun had been fired between the slats. I don't get it. I'd have heard it if there'd been any shooting in here. I was in the next room while Phil was here . . . except—"

"Except what?" Marge asked quietly.

"Except when I went down the hall to borrow the typist." With sudden fierce energy he said to her, "Wipe off those powder marks. Take that scorched rag out and lose it!"

She ignored his words and said to him quietly, "Mr. Kilroy, Jim Vickers was killed before 2:48."

Stewing and sweating in that stuffy wardrobe, I couldn't hold back a grin. The gal was sharp.

Kilroy looked bewildered at the apparently pointless remark. "Why that particular minute? And what of it?"

"There was a heavy gust of wind from the west at that moment." Marge told him in a few quick sentences of my first two time-killing minute-marathons on the typewriter. "That gust scattered the papers; they were all east of Vickers' desk—one lying on the body—"

"I see. Smart figuring. He died before 2:48 . . . and after 2:45—unless Lil Roth lied about seeing him alive then."

Marge's face hardened. "I appreciate your suggestion about destroying the evidence," she said scornfully. "but we'll leave it so the police can see that the shot was fired from these offices. You were the only one here; you knew Phil intended to take his gun to Vick-

ers; you knew it was in his desk, that he wouldn't take it out and unwrap it to examine it before he started out—he'd have no reason to—he wouldn't suspect you'd shot Vickers with it and put it back!"

KILROY'S smile was gone, his face white. He seemed at least a little frightened. He licked his lips and when he spoke his voice was hoarse: "You're accusing me of murder?"

"I am. Vickers stole your—your woman."

I could see his body stiffen, and set myself to dash out at his first move.

"You hussy," he said hoarsely, "you're trying to frame me."

He took one deliberate step forward. I saw her body make a quick, spasmodic move. Kilroy stopped and squeezed his eyes shut, his face contorted with pain. Then I thought, *Margie, my demure little wren, what an unladylike gesture!* She'd kicked out and caught him smack in the groin.

She started to back away. He opened his eyes and lunged at her. She sprang away, and they were out of my sight. She started a scream, which was cut off short.

I untangled myself from the dangling raincoat and plunged from my hiding place. He was squeezing her to him, one arm around her waist, the other hand over her mouth. He saw me, threw her across the room and hung a good right hook on my chin. I went down hard and sat there shaking my head, half paralyzed for the moment.

Kilroy turned and ran out through the anteroom into his own office. By the time I got to my feet, he was back with a .32 revolver in his fist.

Marge was still sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. She'd rapped the wall with her head when he threw her across the room, and wasn't looking very bright.

"Take it easy, Kilroy," I said in my best soothing tone. "Don't do anything you'll regret. That ex-dame of yours will have the cops here any minute. She meant business."

"The door's locked," he answered, breathing hard. "If they come, don't either of you make a sound, or—" He let the sentence hang in the air and waggled the gun at us. "I didn't kill Vickers, and you're not going to frame me."

He knew he was in a corner, and he was getting desperate. I hoped he wouldn't think of that big sample trunk in his office as a means of getting rid of us.

"We're not trying to frame you," I began, still using the bedside manner.

"Shut up!"

I SHUT up. He was scared silly, and anything might set him off. In that case it looked like our collective goose was cooked.

Marge was still sitting on the floor with her back to the wall, her body slumped and one hand gripping the edge of the rug. Kilroy was standing on the rug a few feet from her.

Suddenly she threw herself over, away from him, and yanked at the rug. It slipped an inch or two on the polished floor. He staggered and threw out his arms.

I made a flying tackle and landed a stiff right in his belly. It brought a grunt from down deep in him, and he staggered back through the doorway into the anteroom. I followed up and swung again, but he ducked it. He grappled me with his left arm and I felt the muzzle of his .32 prod my hip. I had just time to think *this is it*, and flinched as he squeezed the trigger.

There was no explosion—just a series of clicks. The gun was empty;

my patron gremlin was on the job. I landed another in his breadbasket as he swung up the revolver and slashed down.

The .32 wasn't heavy, but it raked down the side of my face and hurt like fury. I sagged back against the wall and made like a punch-drunk pug, warm blood trickling down my cheek. I saw Marge grasping the back of a light office chair with both hands.

"Keep out of it, Marge," I mumbled.

Kilroy was holding the gun by the barrel and moving in warily. He threw a quick side glance at Marge, and I went for him. He slashed down with the gun; I weaved aside and took it on my shoulder just as my right connected with his chin.

Then it seemed the ceiling fell on me, and my eyes went out of focus briefly. When they cleared, Kilroy was stretched out on the floor, propping himself up on one elbow and looking very groggy indeed. Marge was standing over me, her mouth sagging open, still clutching the chair in both hands.

She saw I was all right, snapped her mouth shut, took three strides to where Killroy lay, swung the chair again, for luck. Kilroy settled down and went to sleep.

The knob rattled, and there was a volley of pounding on the outer door.

"Okay," I yelled. I got up and turned the knob, and the law came boiling in. Hodge was there, and the Roth wench was with him.

Marge brought Hodge up to date on current events, while a couple of the boys picked Kilroy up and got him into Phil Saxon's office for revival and questioning. When we were alone in the anteroom, Marge went to work to clean up my face and bandage it. She was very solicitous and sympathetic.

She finished the job and said, "Slim, I'm terribly sorry about clouting you, but you walked into it when I swung the chair at Kilroy—"

"Oh, it was you who socked me?"

"Yes, but it was an accident."

"Indeed," I said politely. "That's nice to know." I started for Phil's office.

"Touchy, huh?" she threw after me.

I IGNORED it and joined the crowd. Kilroy was arguing doggedly that he never intended to kill Marge and me, he'd simply lost his head when he saw what we'd stacked up against him, and was stalling for time.

He gave me a dirty look and said to Hodge, "Slim Chance and Marge Dayton broke in here and planted the evidence after you questioned them over at Vicker's office—to frame me. Why else should they come here?"

I put in my oar: "Kilroy *didn't* really try to kill me, Hodge. He held the gun muzzle to my hip."

Kilroy and the others stared at me.

"Of course," I went on, "that doesn't prove him innocent. Killing us would only have added to his troubles."

Kilroy's scowl came back as I continued, "The burnt towel and powder marks on the Venetian blind were planted here last night—not today, as Kilroy claims. A pinch of powder would make the smudges; the feeble report and flash would both be muffled by the towel; the smoke wouldn't show at night."

Hodge raised his brows and said sarcastically, "Of course you can prove that."

I said, "Vickers wasn't shot from here. You couldn't trust a smooth-bore pistol to hit a man's head at that distance. Besides, Kilroy wouldn't have risked it at the time Vickers was killed, because the west wind would have blown the smoke back in here, and he didn't know what minute Saxon might

walk in."

I went on with my audible guessing, but talked as if I had all the facts nailed down: "Vickers was killed with that hammer; your chemists will find traces of blood on it. Then a pistol ball was inserted in the wound."

Lillian said, "That brings us right back to where we started — Philip Saxon."

I heard a little sound of dismay. Marge was staring at me with a look of horror and unbelief.

"You . . . doublecrosser," she said in a hoarse whisper.

I ignored her and answered Lillian: "Vickers was killed before 2:48—you can't get away from those windblown clues." I went melodramatic and poked a finger at her. "It's an ill wind for you, sister. You had a key to this office —a relic of the old days before you ditched Kilroy — just as Vickers was about to ditch you."

Lillian lost some color, but she pulled up one corner of her mouth in a sneer and snapped back at me, "It isn't dark until nine. After six o'clock, I'd have to register in and out of the building with the man downstairs. You won't find my name on his register."

I grinned at her. "Of course not. You came in before six and hung around until dark. After planting your clues, you went down the stairs to the second floor, then down the fire escape at the end of the hall, to the alley. Your finger prints are still out there on the fire escape."

Hodge looked skepical, but nodded to a finger print man and said, "Go down and see." The man went out.

Lillian threw a fit. She sprang up, screaming, "No! I didn't. No matter what you find, I didn't." She darted toward the exit. A cop nabbed her and got a few scratches in the wild scramble that followed.

MARGE signaled me, and I followed her into Kilroy's office, away from the mob.

"I owe you an apology," she said. "I thought you were throwing Phil to the wolves. Won't your face be red if they don't find Lillian's finger prints — or blood on the hammer?"

"They will," I said easily. "Look how she acted. . . . Marge, when did you take up anatomy?"

She looked at me in astonishment. "What are you talking about?"

"I just wondered where you learned that kick in the pants you handed Kilroy."

Her face was like the red, red rose. "I just—just kicked at random," she stammered. "I thought he meant to kill me. I'd have sworn he was the murderer."

"Me, too, until I figured the improbabilities. Then when Lillian put her key into the lock, I began to see things. Before she left, she spilled her—insides, to you and Kilroy."

"Indeed? Not anatomically, I hope."

"No. Financially. She was out of the room when Hodge turned Vickers over and found Phil's note—and pocketed it. But she knew all about it. Remember?"

"You're a smart boy, Slim." Marge smiled sweetly and dug some .32 cartridges from her purse. "I'm glad I found Kilroy's gun and unloaded it."

I blinked at her. "So that's why you came into Kilroy's room first. Sweetheart, you saved me a nasty gunshot wound."

I'm no skin-toucher nor manhandler, and babes and business don't mix. But this was a special occasion. I took her in my arms. "Any time you want to clout me with a chair, it's okay. You're sharp, Margie."

She popped her eyes open, got her palms against my chest and pushed me

away. "Stop it, Slim! What would Phil think?"

We heard a chuckle and looked around. Phil Saxon, now cleared of suspicion, was standing in the anteroom with a pair of cops. I stopped it and bleated a feeble laugh that must have sounded silly as hell.

But broadminded Phil didn't give me so much as a mean look. He walked in, smiling at her. "I'd say the same thing, sweetheart: 'You're sharp, Margie.' "

He'd never impressed me as much of a public demonstrator, but this was a special occasion. Disregarding the grinning bulls, he took over—and did very well indeed.

THE END.

EDUCATION FOR MURDER

MOTION pictures are serving many varied purposes in our times beyond the simple entertainment role for which they were intended. The government has used this medium for the production of documentary surveys, the army has used it for instruction, and the schools are expanding their use of films for educational purposes.

Sometimes, however, movies are put to a destructive use never intended by the pioneers in the field. Take the case of the infamous Murder Club in the city of Sofia in Bulgaria.

This club has a very select membership. To qualify one must have an established reputation as a gunman or a thief. Extortionists and embezzlers are disdainfully accepted as second class members. It is a professional organization of the criminal elite.

Although the activities of the members were left pretty much to their own initiative, there were provisions made for a steady program of education—so to speak. For example, on a given evening at about 8:30, if an outsider were to somehow enter the smoke-filled club room, he would find a screen and motion picture projector being set up. Then, at about 9 o'clock there would be a sudden quiet.

On the screen would flash a motion picture, occasionally an old film, generally the latest release—but always a gangster film filled with gunplay, battles between bandits and police, murders, robberies and the like. Witnessing one of these movies as a part of that audience was a weird experience.

As the film progressed, the audience was not silent but kept up a steady stream of remarks, comments and criticisms. There was no doubt where their sympathies lay. The murder of a policeman or a detective was greeted with cheers and hurrahs, while the inevitable fate of a criminal caused only silence or low, angry growls of dislike and disapproval. A well executed crime was loudly approved, but one poorly done received only catcalls. It was an audience with exactly reverse reactions. The villain was cheered; the hero was booed.

It was not only for entertainment that the movies were shown. When it was over, the discussions would begin. The criminal methods used were closely analyzed. Was the murder planned correctly? Were lookouts spotted to the best advantage? How was the timing? Was police interference foreseen and efficiently counter-acted?

Yes, the Murder Club asked all these questions and the answers it filed away until they could be directly applied. One day, when the liquidation of a nobleman or the elimination of a political enemy was required, the new idea would be put to deadly use. The newspaper headlines would shout the baffling story to the public. But, behind the scenes, the members of the Murder Club would smile. They alone knew that they had discovered a new source of education—education for murder. —*Lee Owen*

WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK

"CALL off the cops!" said folks in Houston, Texas.

"Double the police force!" demanded citizens of Miami, Florida.

Frivolous gentlemen in both cities caused a little commotion recently. And each city found its own way of dealing with its offenders.

When a complaint came to a judge in Houston that employees of a plant were "wolf-whistling" at all the women who worked next door, he ruled that to "whistle while you work" was quite all right, as long as you were at *work*.

But Miami's problem was a ticklish one, and not as easily dispensed with. Reports were widespread in one neighborhood of the city that a prowler was about. Though he stole nothing and apparently did no harm, he had an annoying little habit. On a number of occasions he broke into bedrooms, twitched the toes of the sleeping women, and then fled. Sometimes he tickled their toes, sometimes he pinched them, but once he didn't even bother to enter the room. Opening the window, he reached in and just pulled the girl's toe.

Unlike Houston's casual attitude toward its "wolves" Miami brought out an additional assignment of police in an attempt to cope with its "toe-twitcher." —*Hugo Drake*

KEEPING UP ON THE CRIMES

CRIMES against property are most prevalent in winter and fall off during the summer with December having the peak incidence of robbery and July having the least.

TALK YOURSELF TO DEATH!

by ROBERT MARTIN

When Jim Bennett went out to Caldwell City to clean up the town, he very nearly made the fatal mistake of talking too much

Bullets streaked through the window, catching the mayor as he started to rise

THE job in Chicago had been a little rough, and I had hoped to get a couple of days lay-off. But when I got into Cleveland there was a telegram from the Boss waiting for me. As usual, he wasted no words: GET OUT TO CALDWELL CITY IMMEDIATELY. CONTACT MAYOR CAXTON.

I sighed. I knew that when the Boss said "immediately," he didn't mean the day after tomorrow. So I hopped a bus, and pulled into Caldwell City late in the afternoon.

It was a big, sprawling burg along the Lake Erie shore, between Cleveland and Buffalo. From the bus station I called the *Hotel Erie,* reserved a room, and sent my bag over in a taxi. The mayor's office was in the city hall, a shiny new building with marble pillars and tile floors. I sent in my card, and almost immediately the girl said that Mayor Caxton would see me.

The mayor was a tall thin man, with graying hair and shell-rimmed glasses. His face was lean and clean shaven, with faintly bluish pouches beneath his

gray eyes. He was wearing a gray flannel suit, a soft white shirt, and a blue knit tie. His office was cool and dusky, with the blinds at the big windows drawn against the afternoon sun. The mayor got up from his chair and stretched a bony hand across his massive mahogany desk. We shook hands. His grasp was firm, and he didn't hold my hand too long. He just shook it firmly, and dropped it.

"Sit down, Mr. Bennett," he said. "I've been expecting you all afternoon."

I eased my hundred and ninety pounds into a green leather chair and crossed my legs. He offered me a cigar from a silver box on his desk. I shook my head, said, "Thanks," and rolled myself a cigarette.

He settled back in his chair and looked at my card. "James T. Bennett," he read aloud. "What does the 'T' stand for?"

"Tobias," I said.

He smiled faintly.

"What's wrong with that?" I asked.

"Nothing. Mine is Phineas—George Phineas Caxton." He laid my card on the desk, and his face seemed to grow suddenly grayer, leaner. "Mr. Bennett," he said, "I know your personal reputation, and the reputation of the agency you represent, but I must warn you that the work I want you to do might be dangerous."

I shrugged. "A job's a job. The Boss didn't tell me anything. He just told me to see you today. You're mayor of this town. What is it—murder, gambling, graft, vice or what?"

He said, "I want this town cleaned up."

"Why?" I asked. "Aren't you getting your cut?"

He didn't like it. His gray face got pink, and his hands trembled slightly. He clamped his thin lips tight, and his gray eyes were suddenly cold and bleak. He started to get out of his chair.

I held up a palm. "Take it easy. It makes no difference to me. You're paying the bill. But I gotta know."

He settled back in his chair, relaxed a little. "Mr. Bennett," he said, "are all private detectives as blunt as you?"

"Look," I said. "I'm here to do a job. I get paid for doing it. I'm counting on your help. You tell me where to begin, and I'll begin. I mentioned murder. All right, is that it? Who, when, where? Is it gambling, graft, or what? I want names, places, facts. Where do I start?"

MAYOR Caxton sighed, pushed himself out of his chair, crossed the thick rug to a steel filing cabinet standing against the paneled wall. He opened a drawer, took out a large thick manila envelope, and carried it back to his desk. From the envelope he extracted a sheet of paper. He said. "First, the man we're up against is named Luke Crispin. This is the list of people who work for him—or who are receiving money from him. It is as complete as I can make it, but there are undoubtedly others. Crispin came here about a year ago. He owns The Aurora, a big night club and gambling place at the edge of town. He's the man were after. I've ordered several raids, but we haven't got anything on him yet. And the whole town knows that he is behind all the lawlessness, vice and gambling in Caldwell City."

"City cops being paid off?" I asked.

He nodded grimly. "I can't prove it. That'll be part of your job."

"Okay," I said. "Who's Chief of Police?" I got to my feet.

"Sit down," he snapped. "It isn't as simple as that. Crispin has henchmen, lieutenants. It'll be a tough job."

"Okay," I said.

He looked at me steadily across the

desk. "I just want you to understand what you are up against."

"All right. Who's Chief of Police?" I asked again.

"Ross Archibald."

"Office in this building?"

"Down the corridor to your right."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll see you in in a few minutes. There are a couple of details we'll have to settle." I started for the door.

The mayor's telephone jingled. He lifted it to his ear, and I heard him say, "Send her in." He looked up at me, said "Wait a minute. I want you to meet my daughter."

The door opened, and a girl stepped into the room. She was a looker, all right. Tall, on the thin side, with long black hair, gray eyes, a red painted mouth, dead white skin. Her black tailored suit was simple, expensive, and displayed to advantage her long straight legs, her easy, erect carriage. Class, I thought, and what is called breeding.

She glanced at me coolly, impersonally. The mayor crossed the room, leaned down and kissed her on the lips. She drew away slightly. Caxton said, "Helen, this is Mr. Bennett. He is going to do some special work for me."

"How do you do?" she said, carelessly.

I said, "Hello," and turned to Caxton. "See you later," and I went out.

I found the Chief's office without any trouble. A desk sergeant waved me on in, and resumed his reading of a magazine called *Passionate Confessions*. The door to the Chief's office was standing helf open. I walked in.

The Chief was sitting behind his desk and in the act of tilting a quart of whisky bottle to his mouth. He looked at me out of the corners of his eyes and kept on drinking. I saw his Adam's apple bob three times before he put the bottle down. He coughed, screwed the cap on the bottle, and put it in a desk drawer. Then he opened a paper package of chewing tobacco, rammed three fingers full of chew into his mouth, leaned back in his chair and looked at me. He was a big man, heavy shouldered, with a wide red face. His big nose was a mass of fine purple lines, and his teeth were stained with tobacco.

He said, "Well?" between his jaw motions, and spat at a stained brass spitoon. He missed it.

I said, "Chief Archibald?"

He nodded, and kept on chewing.

I said, "Jim Bennett. American Dectective Agency. When you going to crack down on Luke Crispin?"

HE stopped chewing, and his big feet hit the floor. In the same instant I heard the faint hammering sound of gunfire, and what sounded like a scream. It came from down the corridor, in the direction of the mayor's office.

I hot-footed it out of the Chief's office, past the gaping desk sergeant, and down the corridor. The girl in the mayor's outer office was standing beside her typewriter, and her face was white. I went right on through the big oak paneled door and closed it behind me. I stood with my back to the door and looked things over.

The big windows were shattered, and bright sunshine filled the office. The thick rug was covered with broken glass, and Helen Caxton was standing by the big desk. Her face was a grayish white now, and her red mouth looked redder than ever. She looked at me without expression, and her lips began to tremble, like a kid's before it starts to cry.

Mayor Caxton was on the floor. The thick rug all around him was soaked with his blood. He lay on his side, with

his knees drawn up to his stomach, and there wasn't much left of the top of his head.

George Phineas Caxton, Mayor of Caldwell City, was very, very dead.

CHAPTER II

I LOOKED out of the shattered windows. In the street two stories below a lot of people were milling around, and some of them were running towards the entrance to the city hall. On the opposite corner was a three-story building. Engraved in a cement slab over the entranceway were the words, "Young Men's Christian Association." Except for the city hall, it was the only three-story building in the block. I said, "Stay here," to Helen Caxton and started out the door.

I bumped into the Chief and two cops coming in. The Chief bawled, "Hey, you!" but I kept on going. I ran across the street, up the steps of the Y. M. C. A., and up a stairway off the lobby. There were a lot of steps, and I was breathing pretty hard when I got to the roof. Before I poked my head out, I unlimbered my .38. But I needn't have worried. I was too late—there was nobody on the roof.

I crossed to the city hall side of the building and I could look straight down into the mayor's office across the street. Through the shattered windows I saw persons moving about and the dull gleam of the mayor's desk.

I went back down the stairs to the street. There was a mob around the city hall, and two cops were keeping the curious away from the door. I pushed through the crowd and flashed my agency card on the two cops. They looked doubtful, but I shouldered my way between them and went on into the mayor's office. I slammed the door behind me and looked around the room.

Helen Caxton hadn't minded me—she was gone. Chief of Police Archibald was barking into the mayor's phone. He slammed it down and glared at me. "What in hell do *you* want?"

I looked at the body of Mayor Caxton on the floor. He lay in the same position, but somebody had laid an open newspaper over his head. Blood had already seeped through the paper, and it was a soggy red. The list he had taken out of the file and placed on his desk was gone.

The Chief's face was redder than ever, and his jaw bulged with tobacco. A little of the juice was trickling down his chin. "Get out of here," he said to me.

"Take it easy," I told him. "I told you who I am. I'm working for the mayor."

"*Was* working for him," said the Chief. "He don't need you no more."

I said, "How come you didn't have any of your boys case the Y across the street. That's where the shooting came from."

He clamped his jaws tight shut and got up from the desk. "Listen, you cheap dick. I'm Chief of Police in this town. I'll handle this."

"All right," I said, "handle it." I walked to the door. Then I thought of something and turned around, said, "Hey, Chief. You'd better burn that list of Caxton's." Then I ducked out and slammed the door.

On the way out I bumped into three guys hurrying in. One of them carried a black bag. I figured he was the coroner, and I thought it was about time he got here.

I TOOK a taxi to the *Hotel Erie,* found a phone booth off the lobby, and put in a call to the Boss. I was lucky. He was in the office. "Boss," I said, "this is Bennett, 'way out here

in Caldwell City. Caxton just had his head shot off. I'm tired. Want me to come home?"

The Boss was in bad humor. He started off with a string of bad words, but presently I got the idea that he wanted me to stay on the Caldwell City case, that Caxton had paid his fee in advance, and that when he, the Boss, took a man's money he did him a job, and it didn't matter whether the client was dead or alive—as long as he had slapped the dough on the line. He wanted to know if I had talked to Caxton before he got killed, and I said, "Yessir," and the Boss said I should take it from there, and hung up.

I sighed, crossed the lobby, got my key, hopped an up elevator. My room was on the third floor. When I unlocked the door and stepped inside I heard the sound of running water. The bathroom door was open, and I could see that the shower curtain was pulled shut. My bag was lying on the bed. Beside the bag was a pair of girl's tan gabardine slacks, about a size ten, a matching jacket and a pale green pullover sweater. On the floor was a pair of green sandals, and two brief pieces of filmy white underwear.

I slammed the door, hard, and waited.

The water stopped running. A towel-covered head and round white shoulder emerged from behind the shower curtain. I saw a pair of greenish eyes, black eye-lashes—too long to be natural—a red mouth, a short nose.

She said, "Hello," and grinned at me. "I've been waiting for you. I'll be through in a minute."

I sat down in a chair, crossed my legs, and began to roll a cigarette. "Go right ahead," I said. "Take your time."

She reached out an arm, took a towel from a rack, and disappeared behind the curtain. I sat and smoked. In a couple of minutes she looked out at me again. "Look," she said, "be a good guy and go out in the hall for a couple of minutes."

I grinned at her. "What if I don't?"

She took the towel from her head and a mass of reddish hair fell to her shoulders. She held the curtain shut with one hand and tossed a lock of hair from her face. "Okay, brother," she said. "You asked for it—here I come."

I knew she meant it. "All right," I said, and I got to my feet. "Two minutes." I went out into the hall.

It was about five minutes before she poked her head out of the door and said, "All right, Mr. Bennett. You can come in."

I went in and she was standing in front of the mirror combing her hair. She looked very nice in the slacks, the green sandles and the green sweater. The jacket was still lying on the bed. She combed her hair behind her ears and tied it with a green ribbon, and looked at me, her mouth full of hair pins. "Sit down, sit down," she said. "Make yourself at home."

I said, "Thanks. Do you mind if I have a drink?"

"Heck, no. What have you got?"

"Bourbon."

"Swell. Make mine with plain water."

I said, "Not for me," and I picked up the phone, ordered ice and soda. I opened my bag, took out a quart bottle three-fourths full, and set it on the table. She gave a final pat to her hair, picked up her jacket from the bed, took a package of cigarettes from the pocket, lit one, flicked the match in the direction of the waste paper basket, said, "My name's Rose Sharon. I was born Rosa Spinetti, but I changed it. How do you like it."

I shrugged. "A name's a name. How did you know mine?"

"Easy. The bell-hops are friends of mine."

"Is that how you got into my room?"

"Yep."

"Why?" I asked.

"Relax," she said. "After we have a drink, I'll tell you."

A BOY came in with the ice and soda and put it on the table. I tossed him a quarter, and I saw him wink at the girl as he went out. I put bourbon into two glasses, carried hers to the bathroom and filled it with water from the tap, handed it to her, filled mine with soda, and sat down again.

I said, "Well, Rosy this is all very chummy, but I'm just a teeny-weeny bit curious."

She laughed, said, "Sure, sure, I don't blame you." She took a quick swallow of her drink, flicked ashes on the rug, got up and began to walk restlessly around the room. I watched her. She was a gal who knew her attractions, but she wasn't thinking about them now. She walked to the window, turned and looked at me. "I've heard of you," she said. "I've got friends in Chicago—and other places. They say you are smart and tough and a square-shooter. I know why you are in Caldwell City. I want to help you."

"Why?" I asked. "Crispin give you the brush-off?"

She rattled the ice in her glass, tilted it to her mouth, and put the glass on the table. I poured more bourbon into it, started to get some water, but she stopped me, said, "Never mind," and began sipping at the whisky and ice. "All right," she said. "Luke gave me the brush-off. I still work for him, but that's all. I don't like it."

I asked, "Did Crispin have Caxton killed?"

She looked at me, her green eyes suddenly wide. "Is Caxton—dead?"

"Yep," I said. "Got him this afternoon. I thought the whole town knew it."

"I didn't know," she said. "I've been waiting here for you. You didn't show up, and I felt like a shower, so I took one. How'd they get Caxton?"

"In his office—through the window. Machine-gunned him from across the street. His daughter was there when it happened."

"His daughter?" She leaned across me and snuffed out her cigarette in the tray on the table. Her hair smelled nice.

"Yeah," I said. "His daughter, Helen. What about it?"

"Nothing. I just wondered—did you talk to her? I mean, afterward?"

"Nope. Didn't have a chance. Why? Do you think she killed him?"

"Well," I said, "she could have kicked the window out and then let her old man have it—only she wasn't lugging a tommy gun."

She said, "Do you want me to help you, or don't you?"

"Sure. What'll it cost me?"

She looked at a tiny wrist watch. "You can buy a couple Manhattans and dinner."

"Okay," I said. "Here, or down stairs?"

She lifted her shapely shoulders. "Suit yourself."

I reached for the telephone, and as I did so it began to ring. I put it to my ear, said, "Yeah?"

A girl's voice said, "Mr. Bennett?"

"Yep."

"This is Helen Caxton. Can you come over right away?"

I grinned at the red-head sitting on my bed, and said into the mouthpiece, "Afraid I can't right now. How about later?"

"Please. It's very important that I talk to you now. It's—it's about

Father."

I thought fast, then I said, "All right. Ten minutes."

Rose Sharon picked up her jacket, put it on, started for the door. I hung up the phone, said, "Sorry, honey. How about the bar—about seven?"

She said, "Go to hell, flatfoot," and went, slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER III

MAYOR CAXTON'S house was on the north side of town, not far from the lake. I told the taxi driver to wait, and started up the neat, hedged walk. It was a white shingled house, neither big nor small, with a red tiled roof. Through the trees at the back I could see the reflection of the evening sun on the smooth surface of the lake.

Helen Caxton answered my ring. She was dressed in the same black suit she had worn in the afternoon, and she looked much the same except that there were dark hollows beneath her eyes. Her hair was freshly brushed, and she had painted her lips carefully and evenly. She said, "Thanks for coming, Mr. Bennett," and led me into a comfortably furnished living room.

The house seemed quite, hushed, but as Helen Caxton motioned me to a chair I heard the sound of a woman sobbing. It seemed to come from somewhere on the second floor, and it was low-pitched, continuous. Helen Caxton sat down across the room from me. "My mother," she explained. "She's taken this pretty hard—it was a cruel shock. I'm quite worried about her. She's an invalid, you know."

I said I didn't know, and offered my sympathy and said the usual things. She thanked me quietly, obviously keeping herself under control. The sun had gone down, and it was suddenly dusky in the room. From somewhere in the house a chime clock struck six times.

Helen Caxton said, "I don't want to keep you. You probably haven't had your dinner."

I waved a hand, mumbled protestations, and she said, "I want to thank you for coming to help father. He had so few real friends. He was fighting a lone battle, and now he has paid for his ideals with his life." She dropped her head, and I saw tears glisten on her cheeks. She dabbled at her eyes with a handkerchief, said, "I'm sorry."

I waited. I thought of Rose Sharon, and I decided I was wasting my time here. Presently Helen Caxton said, "Now that father is gone, I suppose you'll be leaving?"

I shrugged. "If there is anything I can do to help—"

"You won't be leaving, then?"

"Miss Caxton, your father paid us our fee in advance. My orders are to stay and try and do what he wanted me to do."

"I see," she said, "but I'm afraid it's hopeless, now that Father is gone."

I squirmed in my chair. "When we take on a job, we try to finish, one way or the other, hell or high water."

"Of course," she said. "I understand. I want to help you all I can. Naturally, we—my mother and I—want to see Father's murderers brought to justice."

"I'll do what I can," I promised her. "Of course, the police will be on it, too."

"Mr. Bennett, if I were you, I wouldn't place too much faith in Caldwell City's police force."

"What about Archibald? Crispin got him bought off?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know Crispin?"

"Only by reputation."

"Do you believe he was responsible for your father's death?"

"I don't know," she said, again.

I was getting impatient. "Who else, then?"

She looked at me. "Mr. Bennett, I'll be quite frank. I don't know this Crispin, but I do know that Father didn't trust the police."

I GOT to my feet. I had wasted a lot of time which might have been spent more profitably with Rose Sharon. I picked up my hat. "Thanks," I said, "for what you've told me. Can I call on you if I need you?"

"Certainly."

I told her again that I was sorry about her father, told her that I would be at the *Hotel Erie* if she wanted me, asked about funeral arrangements.

"I don't know. I've wired my sister. She's coming from New York tomorrow. Other relatives will be here. There will be funeral services here, but Father will be buried in Pennsylvania, near Altoona—his home town."

I thanked her again, and went out. It was almost dark, and as I got into the taxi I saw a car parked in the shadows beyond the street light. The taxi pulled away and I glanced over my shoulder and saw the car move away from the curb and follow us. It followed us all the way down town, and as I got out in front of the hotel I saw it pass. The man beside the driver looked like Chief Archibald, but I wasn't sure. The taxi driver was looking, too. "Was that Chief Archibald?" I asked him.

"I wouldn't know, Jack. You owe me seventy-five cents."

I paid him, and went into the hotel. I entered the bar. It was almost empty. I didn't see anything of Rose Sharon, but it was still early. The bartender was a big guy with a bald head and horn-rimmed glasses. I ordered a double Manhattan with lots of bitters, and asked, Has Rose Sharon been here tonight?"

He finished measuring four shots of bourbon into an ice filled glass, picked up the vermouth bottle, measured out two slugs, said, carefully, "I haven't seen her," and sprinkled Angostura into the glass. He started to spear a couple of cherries, and I said, "Skip the cherries," ordered a couple sandwiches and some coffee, and carried my drink back to a booth. I sat down, facing the door. I had finished the drink and had ordered another one before the food came.

I was drinking the coffee when she came in. She wasn't alone. Two guys walked beside her. One was just a kid, the other older. They walked straight to my booth. I got to my feet. The older guy said, "Sit down. We want to talk to you."

CHAPTER IV

I LOOKED the three of them over. The guy who had spoken was about my own age, maybe a little older, with wide shoulders and a white, smoothly shaven face. His clothes were good, not flashy, and he wore rimless eye- glasses. There was a faint bulge under his left arm which betrayed a shoulder holster. The kid was tall and skinny, with a raw-boned freckled face. He wore a loud brown checked sport jacket, dark brown gabardine slacks, and a green sport shirt open at the neck. He kept his hands in his pockets, while smoke curled from a cigarette in his mouth. He squinted his eyes against the smoke, and his mouth was twisted in a sneer, like the gangsters in the movies. It irritated me to look at him. Rose Sharon, dressed now in a brightly printed dress and big floppy black hat, stood quietly between them.

White face said, again, "Sit down."

"When I'm ready," I said. "Who the hell are you?"

His lips tightened a little, but he held himself in. "My name is Rodney Braithwaite. I believe you have met Miss Sharon."

"Yeah," I said, and I looked at the kid. "Who's the punk?"

The kid's freckled face got red, and he took a half step towards me. Braithwaite made a slight motion with his hand, and the kid stood still, breathing hard and glaring at me from between narrowed lids. I laughed, and said to Braithwaite, "What's the matter with him? Asthma?"

"He's just a little impetuous. May we sit down?"

"All right," I said, and sat down. Braithwaite squeezed in beside me, and the kid and Rose Sharon sat down across from us. She avoided my gaze, but the kid continued to glare at me. He kept his hands in his pockets, and the cigarette still dangled loosely from his mouth.

I said to him, "Sonny, keep your hands on the table."

His lips started to curl. I reached out and slapped him, hard, across his mouth. His cigarette flew out to the floor, and he jumped to his feet, tugging at his coat pocket as he came up. I leaned forward, grabbed his wrist, began to twist it. With my other hand I slapped him again.

Braithwaite said, sharply, "Bennett! Leave him alone."

"Like hell," I said. "Not with a rod in his hand."

THE girl sat still, and Braithwaite didn't move. There wasn't much commotion, and no one in the bar seemed to notice us. Braithwaite said, "All right, Eugene. Put your hands on the table."

The kid relaxed a little, and I let loose of his wrist. He put his hands on the table and sat watching them, his head down. Braithwaite said quietly, "Bennett, you act pretty tough—with kids."

"Nuts," I said. "What do you want? Did Crispin send you?"

"Yes," he said. "He wants to see you—tonight."

I looked at the girl, said, "You didn't waste much time, did you?"

She shrugged her slim shoulders, busied herself lighting a cigarette, and kept her eyes on the table. Braithwaite said, "Don't blame her. We tailed her this afternoon and tonight, caught her outside. We figured she was meeting you."

"How'd you know I was in town?" I asked.

He smiled. "We have ways."

"Suppose I don't want to go with you?"

"I think you'll want to."

I looked at Rose Sharon, and for the first time her gaze met mine. "Luke just wants to talk to you," she said.

I made up my mind, then, and got to my feet. I paid my bill at the bar, and the four of us went out and climbed into a sedan. The kid drove and the girl sat beside him. Braithwaite sat in back with me.

It took us about ten minutes to get to The Aurora. It was on the east side of town, out on the state highway. It was a big, rambling white painted structure with lots of neon lights. We drove around in back of the place, got out, and went up a short flight of cement steps. Braithwaite rang a bell, and in a minute a man in a white coat let us in. We walked down a long hall and I could hear muted music from beyond the partitions. Braithwaite stopped at a door, rapped twice. A buzzer let loose, and he swung the door open. He said, "Rose, you better get

to work. You too, Eugene."

The two of them walked away, and Braithwaite and I entered the room. It was small, but comfortably furnished. I saw a steel safe in a corner, a few leather-covered chairs, a desk. Behind the desk sat a big man in a gray tweed suit. His face was tanned, and his straight blonde hair shone under the shaded light. He had a thin straight nose, a well-shaped mouth and he wore a closely clipped blond mustache. His eyes were pale blue. On the desk in front of him was a small book which he apparently had been reading. When we came in he closed it, and tossed it to a corner of the desk. From where I stood I could see the title. It was Forester's *The African Queen.*

Braithwaite said, "Luke, you want me to wait?"

Crispin said, "Yes, Rodney. Sit down. You, too, Bennett."

I said, "Thanks," and sat down in a straight leather covered chair at the side of his desk. Braithwaite sat in another. "You like Forester?" I asked.

His cold blue eyes showed a faint flicker of surprise. "Yes. Very much."

"So do I," I said. "Read all of his stuff—*Captain Hornblower,* and the rest."

HE SMILED slightly, hunched his big shoulders, and inspected his well manicured fingernails. "That's surprising," he said. "One wouldn't think that a detective of your reputation would find time to do much reading. However, I didn't have you brought here for a literary discussion. Do you plan to be in our city long?"

I shrugged. "That depends."

"On what?"

"On how soon I can round up the killers of Caxton—for one thing."

"What else?"

"A little general cleaning up."

"Don't you think you've taken on a pretty big job?"

I shrugged. "Maybe."

He said, "Mr. Bennett, all this hedging is silly. Don't you think so?"

"Yeah."

He leaned back in his chair. "I know you are smart enough to realize that we can stop you. The simplest way would be, shall we say, a little messy? Whenever possible, I prefer another method. It's simpler, and cleaner. How much?"

"What am I offered?"

"Five hundred dollars."

I laughed, got to my feet. "I thought you were serious. Good night."

"Sit down, Bennett," he said. "You're not going anywhere."

I remained standing. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Braithwaite shift slightly in his chair. I said, "Look. You may be a big shot in this town, but you're just another tin-horn to me. If you want to buy me off, okay, but I come higher than five hundred bucks."

He looked at me steadily for half a minute. Braithwaite sat silently in the shadows. I felt the weight of my .38 in my inside coat pocket, but I knew that if Braithwaite opened up on me I wouldn't have a chance to get at it. Then Crispin laughed. "All right, Bennett. Relax. I like a man who knows his price. How much?"

"Two grand—now—in cash."

He got up, his face expressionless, and walked to the safe in the corner, opened it, counted out some bills, came back and tossed them on the desk. I picked them up, counted them. There were twenty hundred-dollar bills. I folded them over once, stuck them into my pant's pocket, said, "Okay."

Crispin said, "I don't hand out two grand for nothing. Be out of town by noon tomorrow."

I grinned at him. "A deal's a deal."

He nodded at Braithwaite. "All right, Rodney."

Braithwaite got up silently, held the door open for me As we went out I saw Crispin pick up *The African Queen* and resume his reading.

CHAPTER V

WE HEADED down the state highway towards town, and as we did so I looked behind us—from force of habit, I guess. I saw a car swing out from The Aurora and follow us. I didn't say anything to Braithwaite, but I watched the headlights of the car in the rear view mirror. It stayed behind us all the way to the hotel, and as we pulled up at the entrance it swung right at the corner. I said to Braithwaite, "Thanks for the ride," and climbed out to the sidewalk. He nodded silently, and drove away.

I picked up my key, told the clerk to send up some ice and soda, and went up to my room. I had my coat and necktie off when I heard the door open behind me. I figured it was the boy with the set-ups, and without turning around, I said, "You might try knocking. Put it on the table."

I hung up my coat, fished a quarter out of my pant's pocket, and turned around. It wasn't the boy with the ice and soda.

The kid named Eugene was standing there, swaying a little, but the gun in his out-stretched hand was steady enough. His eyes were a little glassy, and his bony freckled face was flushed. His mouth and chin were trembling. I knew he was drunk, but not too drunk to pull a trigger.

I said, "Put away the rod, Sonny. You might hurt yourself."

"You slapped me—in front of *her*." His voice was choked, strangled. He lifted the gun a trifle, held it straight out in front of him, the muzzle pointing at a spot just above my belt buckle.

My belly squirmed a little. He was just a punk kid, but hot lead kills, no matter who slings it. I took a step forward.

"Stand—still," he choked out.

I said, "Now, now. Sonny, take it easy," and I was still talking when I stepped in and swung my arm with everything I had behind it.

He screamed shrilly, and the gun roared out. I felt the hot breath of gunpowder as the slug burned past my cheek. But the force of my blow catapulted the gun from his hand and I heard it strike the opposite wall. I had the kid by the wrist then, and I jerked him in towards me. I jerked him close and held him and held him tight while I beat him across the mouth as fast as I could swing my hand back and forth. He struggled and squealed and tried to bite me, but I kept on slapping him until I saw his eyes began to glaze. I let go of him then, and while he stood swaying I made a full swing with my palm against the side of his face. He hit the wall, hung there an instant, slid to his hands and knees in the corner, and stayed there. His head was down, his long blond hair hung over his eyes, his face dripped blood. He was sobbing like a baby.

I crossed the room, picked up his gun, a little .25 calibre automatic, and put it in my hip pocket. There was a knock at the door, and in the same instant the telephone rang. I opened the door first, told the boy who stood there with my ice and soda to put it on the table. He was looking wide-eyed at the kid in the corner, but I shooed him out, closed the door. I answered the telephone. It was the hotel manager. He said he had reports of a commotion in my room, wanted to know if anything was wrong. I told him, no, there was

nothing wrong, and that there wouldn't be any more noise. As I hung up, there was another knock on my door.

I JERKED it open, and Chief of Police Archibald walked in. I said, "You're just in time, Chief. You can take Sonny Boy, there, along with you."

He looked at the kid in the corner, said, "What happened to him?"

"I had to slap him around a little. He pulled a rod on me."

"Why?"

"Because I slapped him before, a while ago, in front of Rose Sharon. He thinks he's in love with her."

"Did he come here with you—from Crispin's."

"I wondered who was tailing me. No, he just walked in on me."

The Chief was eyeing the bottle on the table. I said, "Help yourself," and he said, "Thanks," and poured himself half a glass full. He drank it straight. The kid in the corner had stopped crying.

The Chief said, "Bennett, I want you out of town by tomorrow."

"How much am I offered?"

"Don't get smart. I'm warning you—get out."

"What if I don't?"

"I'll take you in."

"On what charges?"

He nodded at the kid in the corner. "Assault and battery. You say he pulled a gun on you, but I didn't see him do it."

"So that's the way it is?"

"Yep."

"You know he works for Crispin?"

"That don't make no difference."

"Do you work for him, too?"

"Why, damn you—" he began.

"Relax, relax," I said. "I just wondered. Why is it that you can't run Crispin out of town? That's what Caxton wanted, didn't he? And who killed Caxton? And why? Have you got anyplace on that yet? And what happened to that nice little list of names Caxton had today?"

His face got redder, and he began to breathe hard. "What list? What in the devil are you talking about?"

"Caxton had a list. He said it was a list of people who work for Crispin. I didn't see it, but I wish I had. Do you know anything about it?"

"Hell, no. Caxton didn't say anything to me about it."

"The mayor and the police should have gotten together."

"Look here, Bennett. I'm not fooling. I want you out of town by tomorrow."

"Relax," I said, again. "Have another drink. Maybe we can get together. You need me, and I need you."

"Since when do I need you?" he asked, pouring himself another four shots. "What was you doing at Crispin's tonight—and at Caxton's house?"

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Worried?"

"By God!" he said. "I'm warning you." He walked to the door, but not before he had finished the whisky in his glass.

"I'm not leaving," I said.

"If you don't," he said, "I'll have you picked up on sight."

"I'll take my chances," I said. "Take the kid with you."

The Chief said, "Eugene, come along."

The kid got up, walked past me, his head down. He went out the door. The Chief followed him. I shut the door behind them, filled my glass, and sat down to write a report to the Boss. I was about half finished when the telephone rang.

It was Rose Sharon. She wanted to come up.

"Okay," I said, "but I thought you

were working."

"I am, but I don't go on again until twelve o'clock."

"What do you do, anyhow?"

"I thought you knew. I sing with the band part of the time, and do a specialty act in the floor show the rest of the time."

"What do you mean, 'a specialty act'?"

She laughed. "The yokels call it a strip-tease, but it's more refined than that. Be there in ten minutes."

I transferred my coat from the closet to the back of a chair, hung it with the inside pocket out, so that I could get at my .38 easier. Then I finished my report, dropped it down the mail chute in the hall, and waited. In exactly twelve minutes from the time she had called me I heard her knock on the door.

CHAPTER VI

SHE was alone, and I relaxed a little. She was wearing the same print dress and big hat she had worn earlier in the evening. She walked in, tossed her hat on the bed, ran her fingers through her red hair, and said, "Make mine with plain water. Remember?"

"Yeah," I said. "I remember. I'm sorry I had to walk out on you this afternoon. As it turned out, I should have stayed here."

She laughed. "I could have told you that. But I want to tell you that I'm sorry, too. I didn't have anything to do with Braithwaite and Eugene cornering you in the bar tonight. I swallowed my pride and decided to meet you, after all. They followed me."

"That's okay," I said, handing her a glass. "No harm done."

She sat down on the bed, began to sip at her drink. "How did you make out with Luke?" she asked.

"Okay," I said. "Why?"

"Just wondered. Are you still going to crack down on him?"

"Why?"

She laughed again, a little nervously. "Is that your favorite expression? Why? I want to know, that's why."

I could have said, "why," again, but instead I asked, "You still want to help me?"

"I told you I did."

"All right. Tell me this. How many rackets is Crispin in? Gambling, and what else?"

She swallowed her drink at a gulp, handed me her glass. I refilled it, passed it back to her. She said, "He's interested in anything which will pay him a profit." She stopped, and looked into her glass.

"Don't get bashful now," I said.

"I'm not bashful," she said. "I just want to be sure I can trust you. If Luke knew I was telling you this—" She laughed, and ran a red-nailed finger across her throat.

"Sure they didn't tail you here?"

"I don't think so."

"All right. What else is Crispin in?"

"Dope," she said.

"My God," I said. "It carries me back to 1929. You mean cocain, opium —stuff like that?"

"Yes. All of it. Braithwaite handles that end. Luke gets a percentage. The Aurora is sort of a clearing house all along the lake—from Buffalo to Chicago. I think the gambling is just a front."

"You're doing fine," I said. "Now tell me this. Where do they store the stuff?"

"In a room off of Luke's office. A concealed door behind his safe. They're shipping a load to Chicago tomorrow night."

"Is The Aurora open all night, every night?"

"No. Only on Friday and Saturday nights. The rest of the time it closes at three o'clock."

"Does Crispin live there?"

"No. He stays at an apartment in town."

"Is he married?"

"If he is, he never told anyone."

"One thing more. Why did Crispin give you the brush-off?"

SHE held her glass with both hands, and stared down into its depth. Her red mouth was sullen. Then she shrugged. "That doesn't make any difference."

"All right," I said. "Don't let it get you down. You're well out of it. Why do you keep on working for him?"

"I don't know. I guess it's because I see him once in a while, am around him a little.

"It's like that, huh?"

She nodded her head, still staring down into her glass. Then she lifted it to her lips, drained it, handed it to me and said, "More."

The bourbon was all gone, so I went to my bag and took out a spare bottle, opened it, and made her another drink. "Better go easy," I said. "Remember that midnight show."

"I don't care," she said, "and I'm sure the yokels won't care, either."

I had one of my rare boy scout streaks. "Why don't you go away?" I asked. "If it's a job, I can fix that up. And it won't be doing a refined specialty number, either."

"Thanks," she said, "but I'll stick here for a while."

"You won't even get to see Crispin when he's in the jug."

"I know it."

"Do they know that you know about the dope?"

"I don't think so. Eugene told me when he was drunk. And I looked one day, when they were gone, and it was there, all right." She took a long swallow, said, "It's a long time between drinks."

"Look" I said, "you're welcome to the whisky, but it's going on twelve o'clock, and if you don't show up, Crispin is going to wonder."

"To hell with Luke Crispin," she said.

I put on my coat and hat, picked up her hat from the bed and handed it to her. "Come on. I'll take you out there."

She shook off my hand, went to the mirror and put on her hat. Thanks, flatfoot," she said, "but I'll be all right."

"Sure?"

"Sure. I can take care of myself."

"Will I see you again?"

"I'll be around—for a while. Maybe I'll take you up on that job proposition—later on."

"Let me know," I said. "And thanks for the information."

"Forget it," she said, carelessly, and I caught the faint perfume of her as she passed me. She went out the door, a small, erect figure with neat dancer's legs and mass of reddish hair falling to her shoulders.

I WAITED until I heard the elevator door go shut, and then I turned out my light, closed and locked my door, and beat it down the hall to the stairway. I hit the lobby just as the doorman swung open the revolving doors for her. I walked to the doors, saw her get into a small coupe across the street, and head east. I ran out to the curb then, climbed into the first taxi in line, and told the driver to follow the coupe. We stayed about a block behind it, and after we left the traffic of the center of town it was easy to keep her car in sight.

A big sedan roared around us. When

it got abreast of the coupe it slowed down and pulled in. The coupe swerved towards the curb, and that instant I saw the red streaks of flame pour from the sedan. And then the coupe hit the curb, bumped over it, and crashed into a fire plug.

The cab driver shouted, "Jeez!" and began to slow down.

I said, "Keep going! Follow that sedan. Step on it!"

He said, "Not me, buddy. That's a job for the cops."

I jerked out my .38 and held it under his nose. "Follow that sedan—fast."

He said, "Okay, okay," and began to feed gas. For a couple of blocks we gained on the car ahead, and when we passed under a street light I saw that the driver was apparently the only occupant. And then we hit an open stretch, and the sedan pulled away from us.

"All right," I said to the driver. "Go back to the coupe."

He gave me a scared, sidelong look, said, "If you put that cannon away, I think maybe I could drive better. Are you a cop?"

"Yeah," I said. "Shut up." I had forgotten that I was still holding my .38. I was thinking about Rose Sharon.

In a couple of minutes we were back to where Rose's coupe had crashed into the fire plug. I got out and walked across the street.

Lights were beginning to come on all over the neighborhood, and from far away I heard the wail of a siren. Several cars were pulled up along the curb, and there was a little knot of curious, silent people gathered around the wrecked car. A guy was shining a flash light into the window on the driver's side. I elbowed my way through the crowd, not wanting to see what I knew I was going to see.

She sat with both hands on the wheel, her head resting against the back of the seat, her green eyes wide open. There was a dark ugly hole under her left ear where one of the slugs had hit her.

Rose Sharon, born Rosa Spinetti, would dance no more.

CHAPTER VII

I LEFT before the ambulance and the cops arrived. When I got to my room I took a stiff slug of bourbon, straight, and waited. I didn't have long to wait. In ten minutes there came a pounding on my door. I opened it. Chief Poss Archibald stood there, with two harness bulls in the hall behind him. The three of them moved into my room like the flying wedge of an old-time football team.

Archibald said, "Bennett, how long you been here?"

I looked at my wrist watch. "Ten minutes."

"Where was you before that?"

"Out."

He talked around the wad of tobacco in his cheek. "Don't get funny. Where you been in the last half hour?"

"Why?"

He began to chew a little faster, and his big face got the color of fresh beef steak. "Dammit! Answer my questions! I don't care who you are, or who you work for. I'm the law in this town."

"Take it easy," I said. "I've been riding around in a taxi, and I was right behind Rose Sharon when she got killed. But I didn't do it."

"Who did, then?"

"How in hell do I know? Somebody in a black sedan."

"You wasn't riding with her?"

"Nope—following her in a taxi."

"Why?"

"Personal reasons."

He gave me a yellow-toothed, wol-

fish grin. "Bennett, the doorman downstairs says you got into the coupe with her and the two of you drove off together. He says you was driving. He says he'll swear to it in court, or anyplace else."

I said, "So that's the way it is?"

One of the cops unlimbered a business-like Police Special, and the other cop moved over to the door. Archibald gurgled something which sounded like, "Yes," and begun to peer around for a place to spit. I motioned towards the bath room, and he went in, mumbled, "Watch him, boys," and came out, wiping his mouth with a big red bandanna.

"Well," he said, "let's go. Get his gun, boys."

The two cops lifted my .38, felt and patted me all over, didn't find any more hardware, and pushed me towards the door.

I said, "Can I make a telephone call?"

"Nope. You ain't calling nobody."

One of the cops kept the Police Special pointed at my belly, and the other one handcuffed my hands behind me. Then they herded me down the hall to a back stairway, down to a side door, and out to the street. They piled me into a squad car and drove to the police station. Nobody spoke. The Chief sat in front, and I could see his jaws moving steadily.

FIVE minutes later I found myself booked on a murder charge and locked in a cell. They pushed me in, clanged the door behind me. The Chief watched them do it, a satisfied smile on his face. Then he walked away, chewing. He didn't say any more to me, and I didn't say anything to him.

I laid down on the narrow bunk and tried to get some sleep. I didn't have much luck. I dozed off a few times, and when I did I dreamed about Rose Sharon and in my dream she and I were dancing (I haven't danced in years) and she was laughing. Then she would stop laughing and her green eyes got wide and she would begin to scream. I woke up three times with her scream piercing my ears, and after the third time I didn't try to sleep any more.

Along about six o'clock in the morning a young cop brought me some coffee and rolls. I looked him over and decided that he would serve my purpose. I knew what they paid cops, especially young ones, in a town the size of Caldwell City. I took the tray he handed me and said, "Thanks. How about doing me a favor?"

He looked suspicious, said, "What?"

I took out my wallet and counted out two twenties and a ten. He watched me. I folded the bills over once, and held them in my hand. "Fifty bucks," I said, "to make a phone call."

He looked at the money, ran his tongue over his upper lip. "All right," he said. "Who do you want me to call?"

I told him to get a pencil and paper, and when he came back with them I wrote down the Boss' name, address and telephone number. "Now, look," I said. "At ten o'clock this morning call this number in New York and get this man. If you call before ten, he won't talk to you. But start calling at ten. Don't talk to anyone else. When you get him, just say, 'Jim Bennett is in the Caldwell City jail. He wants you to call Chief of Police Ross Archibald and get him out. He'll explain everything later.' Got it?"

He nodded his head nervously, reached for the money. I gave it to him, said, "How about bringing me the morning papers?"

"Don't have any morning locals. I

can get you the Cleveland papers."

"All right. Bring me those, and last night's locals."

He brought me the papers, and I said, "Got that call straight?"

He said he had it straight, and left. I settled down on the bunk and read the papers. There was quite a spread in the two locals about the mayor's murder, but nothing about motives or suspects. The Cleveland papers gave the story a half a column, but were also mum on the subject of a reason for killing. I read all the papers, including the funnies, and waited. A drunk in a cell down the corridor woke up and began to moan. A cop went past my cell, and I said, "Hey, copper, the Chief come in yet?"

He said, "Naw," and kept on walking. I heard him tell the drunk to be quiet, and he came back to my cell and peered at me through the bars. "And don't call me 'copper,' " he said. "Did you kill that Sharon dame?"

"Sure," I said. "She was stepping out on me. If there is anything I can't stand, it's a two-timing woman."

He looked interested, said, "Yeah?"

I HEARD a door slam, and the hard pounding of footsteps on cement. I looked at my watch. Ten forty-five. The Boss hadn't wasted much time. In a second Chief Archibald hove into sight at the end of the corridor. He was walking fast, chewing fast, and his face was the color of a well baked brick, with an added purplish tinge. He stopped in front of my cell and glared at me through the bars. The cop backed away, and headed down the corridor. The Chief's bellow brought him to a heel-skidding stop. "Malloy! Come back here!"

The cop turned around, walked slowly back, and stood at a safe distance. "Yessir?"

"Unlock this man's cell. I'm releasing him for lack of evidence."

It hurt the Chief to say it, but he got it out without looking at me. The cop unlocked the cell door, and I stepped out, said, "Thanks, Chief."

"Bennettt," he said, through compressed lips, "get out of town. And stay out."

"Yes, Chief," I said, and walked away, a free man again.

I never knew what the Boss had told him, but it must have been plenty. I knew from past experience that the Boss carried a lot of weight around the country, and I grinned to myself when I thought of what he might do in the way of putting the pressure on a small town constabulary. But I also began to worry about what I was going to tell him in my next report.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Chief had ordered me out of town, and Luke Crispin had paid me two thousand dollars to get out of town—by noon today. So I did the smart thing—I got out of town.

I went back to the hotel, collected my bag, paid my bill, and hopped a bus for Cleveland. When I got there, I checked my bag, and took a taxi to the Cleveland office out on Detroit Avenue. Tom Stokes was on duty, and he got me another gun and sympathized with me in all my troubles and heartaches. Then I went out and bought some blue denim pants, a red and black checked flannel short, a black leather jacket, a pair of heavy work shoes and some cheap horn-rimmed glasses. Tom Stokes fixed me up with a battered gray felt hat. He said he kept it in his locker because it was his favorite fishing hat.

Then I called the bus terminal, learned that there was a bus heading east in forty minutes. So Tom got out

a bottle, and we had a few drinks. It was rye, but it helped to pass the time. After a while it was time to catch my bus, and I gathered up my purchases and Tom's old hat. In fifteen minutes I was on a bus and headed back for Caldwell City.

When I got there, I took a taxi down to the lake front, found a flop house close to the harbor, signed "Joe Doakes" on the dirty register, and left my stuff in a dingy two-by-four room. Then I went back down the dirty stairway and slipped the old guy on the desk a ten spot. "Listen, pappy, if anybody comes in here asking any questions you tell them that Joe Doakes is a little skinny guy with white hair. Got it?"

He nodded, said, "Okay, Joe. You can count on me."

It was just beginning to get dark, and I had to walk five blocks before I snagged a taxi. I told the driver to take me to the Caxton residence on Lake Front Drive. When we got there, I told him to wait and went up and rang the bell. A fat guy with a bald head and a black mustache came to the door. I said, "I wonder if I could see Mrs. Caxton for a moment? Bennett is the name."

He hesitated. "Mrs. Caxton isn't feeling very well—"

"I'm sorry. Is Miss Caxton at home?"

"No," he said, "Not at present. I'm Mrs. Caxton's brother. Could I help you?"

"I'm afraid not," I said. "If I could see Mrs. Caxton for just a moment—"

"Come in," he said. "I'll see."

I followed him inside, and he told me to wait in the small entranceway. From somewhere inside the house I heard the low murmur of voices, and I figured that the Caxton clan had begun to gather. I didn't smell any flowers, and decided that the body of Mayor Caxton was down town in a funeral home.

In a couple of minutes Black Mustache came back, said, "Mrs. Caxton will see you for a short time. I'll take you to her room."

I said, "Thanks," and followed him up a stairway and down a hall to a door, at the end. He opened the door, said, "Here's Mr. Bennett, Hannah," and then in a whisper to me, "I'll wait in the hall. Don't stay too long. This has been a great shock to her."

I nodded, walked into the room, and Black Mustache closed the door softly behind me.

Hannah Caxton was lying, fully dressed, in a half reclining position on a bed with a pile of pillows at her back. The only light in the room was a small reading lamp fastened to the bed over her head. It shone mercilessly on her face, and I was shocked at what I saw.

HANNAH CAXTON had once been beautiful, but she was beautiful no longer. Age and illness had taken their toll. The light shone on brassy dyed hair, with streaks of gray running through it. Her thin, wrinkled face was chalk white and crusted with powder. Vivid red lipstick smeared her thin lips. Deeply penciled brows arched coyly over her tired old eyes. I took the rest in at a glance—plain black dress, gold earrings, thin white hands with red-painted fingernails. There was an ash tray at her side filled with cigarette butts, and a cigarette burning in her hand. In the room there was the stale smell of smoke, heavy perfume, and the musty smell of age.

I mumbled expressions of sympathy. She lifted a hand and motioned me to a chair. I sat down and said, "I'm sorry to intrude upon you at this time, but as you no doubt know, Mr. Caxton

employed me, just before his death, to do a certain job for him. I intend to do that job. I'd like to ask a few questions."

"I'll answer no questions," she said. "George Caxton was a fool."

"But, surely, Mrs. Caxton, you want to see your husband's murderers brought to justice?"

Her mouth and chin began to tremble, and she turned her face against the pillows. Tears streaked the thick layer of powder on her cheeks, and she began to sob, slowly and brokenly. "Turn out that damned light," she said.

I got up, switched on a desk lamp across the room, went to her bedside and turned off the light over her head, sat down again. I waited. She sobbed quietly for a few minutes, her face averted. Then she dabbed her eyes with a black lace handkerchief, and said in a tired voice, "Go away. Leave me alone. I know nothing—except that he is dead. He never told me anything. He was a fool."

She began to sob again, and I got to my feet. "I'm sorry to have bothered you, Mrs. Caxton. Good evening."

She didn't answer, didn't look at me, and I went out. Black Mustache was still waiting. I closed the door softly, and we went down the hall together. At the head of the stairs we met Helen Caxton coming up. She stopped, her hand on the bannister, and looked at us. She said, "Good evening, Mr. Bennett," and I nodded. She looked at Black Mustache. "Uncle Horace, how is Mother?"

"The same, Helen," he said, and shook his head.

She looked at me, "And how is your work progressing, Mr. Bennett?"

I shrugged. "I'm still trying."

"Can I be of any help?"

"Not at the moment. I'll let you know."

"Please do," she said, and went down the hall to her mother's room.

Black Mustache saw me to the door. I went out and got into the taxi, told the driver to take me down to the harbor, and we headed west on the lake boulevard. The driver said, "Nice night," and I said, "Yeah," and looked out over the lake. It wasn't quite dark, and the lake was calm. I saw the lights of two ore boats heading into the harbor, and out beyond them were the twinkling red dots of the buoys marking the channel. There wasn't any traffic, and the night was still. For the first time in a couple of days I began to relax a little.

I didn't hear the car coming until it was almost upon us. I heard the roar of its motor, and I looked over my left shoulder and saw the black hood nosing up from behind. Its lights were out, but in the dusk I saw the wicked gleam of a gun barrel over the car's rear window.

I yelled, "Duck!" to the taxi driver, and I hit the floor boards. In the same instant the gun let loose and the windows of the taxi went out with a shattering crash. I felt the taxi swerve and jump as it hit the curb, and I tried to squeeze myself lower. The ugly chatter of the gun continued, and my left arm suddenly jumped, quivered and went numb. Something heavy fell against me, pinning me beneath the dash board. The taxi came to a jolting, crashing stop. And then everything was quiet.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE stillness and quiet following the crash my first sensation was one of rage—hot, burning, unreasoning rage. I wanted the feel of a gun in my hand and the pleasant pressure of a

trigger beneath my finger. I had taken a lot in this town, and I figured it was about time that I began to dish it out. In those few seconds on the floor of the wrecked taxi I thought of the people of Caldwell City, and of the screwy mess I had gotten myself into. I thought of them all—of Mayor Caxton; his daughter, Helen; his wife, Hannah; of Chief Archibald and his decayed police force; of Luke Crispin and the silent Braithwaite, of the punk kid, Eugene. I thought of the town itself, an evil city sprawled along the lake. I thought of Rose Sharon, caught in the spider web of Caldwell City, and I thought of how she had looked when she died. I thought of all these things in the space of a few seconds, and then I began to squirm and struggle to get out of the taxi. I had an overpowering impulse to get going, to kill, to clean this ugly town out. It was what I was being paid to do, and I wasn't doing it.

Something wet and hot was dripping onto the back of my neck, and I tried to move, to get out from under the weight of the taxi driver on my back. He had fallen sideways, away from the wheel, and I knew that he was dead —that his body had taken the slugs intended for me. He lay heavily against me, and his warm blood was on my face, my neck, my hands. I reached up, found the door latch, and pulled down on it. The door opened, and I slid myself out from under the dead driver.

I saw the lights of a car coming up the boulevard. It slowed down, and I ducked into the shrubbery which topped a rocky hill sloping down to the edge of the lake. The car stopped by the wrecked taxi, and people got out. I ran down to the water's edge and headed towards town along the rocky beach. My arm was hurting, above the elbow, but I could move it, and I knew that it wasn't hit bad.

I walked a long ways along the narrow beach. I stopped once to wash my face and hands on the surf. Then I climbed the hill to the boulevard. I saw that I was only a few blocks from the business district, and I walked until I found a drug store. I bought some gauze, tape, iodine, went out, caught a taxi at the corner, told the driver to take me down to the harbor.

We stopped in front of the joint where I had left my stuff. I paid the driver and went in. The same old pappy was still on duty, and as he slid my key across the desk I asked him if anyone had been around asking for me.

He said, "Nope," and I went on up to my room. I had a couple of drinks, and I patched up my arm. One slug had burned the hide of my left arm close to my shoulder. It hurt some, but not bad. I figured I was very, very lucky.

I made out a heavily censored report to the Boss. Then I went down to the street, dropped the report into a mail box, found a sea food dive and filled up on Lake Erie perch and French fried potatoes. After that I went back up to my room, flopped on the bed for an hour, but I didn't sleep.

AT NINE-THIRTY I got up, put on the clothes I had bought in Cleveland, and looked at myself in the cracked mirror. Even with the horn-rimmed glasses and two days' growth of beard I still looked too much like myself. I don't go in much for Sherlock false faces, and the Boss thinks disguises are silly, but this time I didn't see any help for it. I dug a black mustache, not too bushy, out of my bag, and pasted it on my upper lip. It helped a lot, and I decided that anyone who did not know me well would have a hard time recognizing me with a

casual glance.

Tom Stokes, in Cleveland, had picked me out a .38, the calibre he knew I usually carried, and I checked the cylinder to make sure it was full. Then I put the gun and an extra handful of cartridges in the pocket of the leather jacket. I put the jacket over my arm, and went down the narrow dark stairway to the tiny cubicle called a lobby.

The old guy on the desk looked up at me, and his eyes popped. I held up a finger, said, "Sh. F.B.I."

"When did you check in?" he asked.

"Tonight," I said. "Joe Doakes."

"Oh, yeah, oh, yeah," he said. "Say, Joe, there was a couple of guys in here asking questions—while you was upstairs. I told 'em what you said I should."

"What they look like?"

"Just a couple of guys—one of 'em a stocky guy with glasses, the other a kid in a zoot suit."

"Okay," I said, "Thanks." I laid a ten spot on the desk in front of him. "Where's the furnace room?"

He never batted an eye. "Through that door and down the steps. Light switch on your right."

I opened the door, found the light, and went down the stairs. I found the furnace and the coal pile and I smeared coal dust on my brand new clothes. I found a can of oil, mixed some of the coal dust with the oil, and that made it better. I even rubbed some of the dust into my whiskers. When I went back upstairs the old guy took one look at me, said, "My God," shook his shiny bald head, and went on reading his paper.

I said, "See you later, Pappy," and went out. He just waved a hand, palm up, still shaking his head, and he didn't look up.

Taxis were scarce along the lake front, and I walked three or four blocks. There were a lot of ships in the harbor, and I noticed one which was docked close in. On its black bow were the words, *Sturgeon Bay, Duluth.* When I finally found a taxi I told the driver to take me out to The Aurora.

He nodded, looked at me, said, "In off the ore boats?"

"Yeah," I said. "Boiler fireman on *The Sturgeon Bay,* out of Duluth. We're taking on a cargo, and we pull out for Buffalo at midnight. Thought I'd look this Aurora over. Heard a lot about it."

He laughed, "A good place to lose your money, buddy."

I didn't say anything, and pretty soon I saw the lights of The Aurora along the highway. I got out, paid the driver, and went in.

CHAPTER X

THE check room girl said, "A dollar and a half, please."

"Any drinks included in that?"

"No, sir. That includes the floor show only."

"What time is the next show on?"

"Twelve o'clock."

I gave her a buck and a half, started on in. She said, "Check your coat, sir?"

"No," I said, and walked into the bar.

It was a big room, with booths around two walls. The bar ran clear across one wall, and at the far end of the room was a raised orchestra platform and a small stage. Tables were packed in between. Most of the tables were filled with couples drinking and talking. The orchestra platform was empty, but a juke box was going full blast. The air was heavy with smoke. I found a stool at the bar, ordered a bourbon and soda, and as I drank it I looked at myself in the mirror behind the bar. The

glasses and the fake mustache gave me a laugh, but I figured they did a pretty good job of camouflage.

I sat a while, drank, watched the people, and familiarized myself with the lay-out of the place. People were continually coming and going through a big door at one side of the stage. The crowd was a mixed one, composed of well-dressed men and women, some not so well-dressed, and many in working clothes like myself. There were a number of service men, both army and navy. On the surface, The Aurora was just a glorified juke joint, common in the middle west, with no class distinction or snobbery. Everyone was behaving himself, and the big cash register at the end of the bar kept up a constant jingle. Uniformed waitresses served the tables, and four bartenders were kept busy dispensing beer, whiskey and mixed drinks.

After my third bourbon and soda I slid off the stool and strolled back to the door beside the stage. As I went through, a tall skinny man with black hair and black mustache and wearing a well-fitting tuxedo, casually looked me over. He made no move to stop me. I nodded to him, and he said, "Good evening," and I went down a short hall opening into a vast, brilliantly lighted room filled with people and every imaginable type of gambling device.

I walked over to one of the crap tables and watched. A beefy man in blue overalls and a red hunting cap picked up the dice and tossed a two and a four. The croupier said, "Six is your point." I tossed a ten-dollar bill on the line, said, "Ten he does," and the croupier nodded. The beefy man threw the dice. A three and a four came up, and I walked away. I played a little roulette, lost again, and won part of it back on a chuck-a-luck wheel. I wandered around some, gambling a little, but mostly watching. It was a quarter of twelve when I became aware of the two men.

I remembered seeing them earlier, out in the bar. They appeared to be doing like everyone else—drinking, strolling about, watching, gambling a little. They didn't appear to be watching anyone in particular, but there was an alertness about their eyes, and a kind of tenseness in their bearing. They were both fairly young, and both dressed in dark, conservatively cut clothes. I decided to keep an eye on them.

The orchestra began to play out in the bar, and a lot of the people in the gambling room made a bee-line through the door. I went in with them and snagged a stool at the bar, ordered a drink, turned around with my back against the bar with my coat on my lap and watched the show.

THE orchestra played a short snappy number, and then the inevitable master of ceremonies bounced out, made a few cracks, grabbed the microphone, and began to sing. I looked around the room. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted a man standing in the doorway to the check room. It was Rodney Braithwaite, and he was just standing there, looking around the room. His eyes traveled up and down the bar, and he looked straight at me without a flicker of recognition. In a couple of seconds he disappeared.

The guy up on the stage was making a spiel, and something he said caught my attention. "—we were all saddened to hear of the death of Rose Sharon, our lovely feature artist who has entertained you so often here at The Aurora. It was our thought that perhaps you folks would like to join in with us in a floral tribute to Miss Sharon, and any contribution you care

to make will be gratefully accepted. Come on, folks, give! Flowers for Rose!"

People began throwing coins upon the stage and they fell upon the platform like raindrops. I turned away. I'm just a big slob who makes his living by other people's weaknesses, and I don't have much time for the so-called finer things of life, but this exhibition sickened me, seemed somehow out of place. I thought of Rose Sharon, born Rosa Spinetti, and of how she looked when I last saw her alive in my hotel room, a lovely creature who had somehow got a bad start, had learned too much for her years, and had paid for it with her young life. And I knew, somehow, that she would not have approved of people tossing coins upon a stage to buy flowers for her grave.

I gulped down my drink, and decided that it was about time to get to work. The floor show would last forty-five minutes, and this was the time I had been waiting for. I said to the bartender, "Where's the john?"

He said, "Past the checkroom, down the hall to your right."

I slung the jacket over my arm, and the weight of the .38 in the pocket gave me a peculiar savage pleasure. I was still thinking of Rose Sharon. I went out the door to checkroom, and down the hall. A sign said, "Men," and I went in. Nobody was there, and I took the .38 out, stuck it in the hip pocket of my overall pants, hung the jacket on a peg on the wall, and transferred the extra cartridges to my pants pocket. The gun made a big bulge, but I didn't care any more. It felt good on my hip.

I went out, and in the hall I spotted a door at the end. I tried it, found that it was locked. I went back down the hall and out into the bar again. I didn't see any sign of the two guys in the dark suits. I walked back into the gambling room. The skinny guy standing guard at the door said, "Don't you like the show?"

I said, "It's okay," and moved over to the nearest crap table. I saw that the skinny guy was still watching me. But I had spotted another door in the far corner of the room, and I hoped that it wasn't locked, too. I acted interested in the crap game, and watched for a chance to duck over to the door.

A voice at my elbow said, "I thought you was shipping out at midnight?"

CHAPTER XI

I TURNED. It was the taxi driver who had brought me out to The Aurora. "They're still loading," I said. "I just called. I got another hour yet."

He said, "I just had a fare to the dock. I saw *The Sturgeon Bay* pulling out."

I shrugged. "All right. It won't be the first time I jumped ship."

He edged closer to me. "Looks like a rod on your hip. Maybe I better tell Luke."

I moved away, said, "Go sober up." He followed me, began to talk loud. "I'm gonna tell—"

The sound of gun-fire blotted out his words. I swung around, got my gun in my hand. But I held my fire. One of the dark-suited young men was standing in the middle of the room, a big black gun in his hand, its smoking muzzle pointed at the ceiling. His partner stood in the doorway to the bar with a black automatic in his hand. The skinny door-watcher stood against the wall with his hands high in the air. Women screamed, men shouted, and the whole crowd surged toward the walls, away from the guy in the center of the room. Through the doorway I could see people milling around in the bar, and I got a glimpse of another

gunman standing in the archway to the checkroom. I squatted down and scooted for the door I had spotted in the corner. Behind me the guy in the center of the room shouted, "Hey, you! Stop!"

I reached the door, yanked at the knob. I heard the blast of the gun behind me, and the thud of the slug as it smacked the door beside my head. Some dame let out a high, piercing scream. I yanked at the door. It wasn't locked—just stuck. The gun behind me let loose again, and chips flew from the knob. The door jerked free then, and I jumped through it into darkness.

I flattened myself against the wall and waited, my .38 poised, for somebody to come through. Nobody did. I could see a little better, and the place seemed familiar to me. I suddenly knew that I stood close to the entrance of The Aurora through which Braithwaite had taken me the night before. Crispin's office was just ahead.

THE sound of gun-fire reverberated against the walls, and a man came pounding down the hall. I stuck out a foot as he dashed past, and he went sprawling. He cursed as he hit the floor. I stepped in close and rammed my gun into his ribs, grabbed him by the collar. "Get up," I said, "and don't try anything."

He got to his feet, and in the dim light I saw that it was the skinny guy in the tuxedo—the door-watcher. I buried the sight of my .38 in his belly and said, "All right. Keep going. I'll be right behind you. Tell Crispin to let you in."

He was breathing hard, and his long black hair was hanging over his eyes. He nodded his head quickly, and went down the hall to a door. I followed, with my gun glued to his back. He banged on the door, yelled, "Luke! It's a stick-up out there! Let me in!"

The door opened a crack, and I heard Crispin curse. "By God, Cafferty, I pay you to watch things! Get in here and help get this stuff out."

The door swung open wide enough for the skinny guy to get through, and he went in. I pushed right in after him, planted my foot against his back, and sent him crashing into Crispin, and they both wound up against the wall. Crispin swung away from the wall, a gun in his hand, his teeth bared beneath his yellow mustache. In the same instant a woman screamed, and then Helen Caxton was all over me. She bit and scratched and cursed, and for a second I had my hands full.

Crispin yelled, "Get away from him, Helen!"

But she hung on. I got my gun arm loose, and as Crispin's gun roared I jumped clear of her. The door splintered behind me, and my .38 leaped in my hand as I pumped two slugs at Crispin. The impact smacked him back against the wall, and a thin trickle of blood suddenly ran down his chin, but his gun came up again. I yelled, "Hold it, Crispin!"

Helen Caxton came screaming at me. In the same instant Crispin's gun spat flame. She ran straight into it. She stopped suddenly, swayed on her feet, fell against me, and slid to the floor. I fired again, and Crispin's knees bent. He dropped his gun, and he turned his face to the wall. Slowly he slipped to th floor, his hands leaving a bloody trail on the wall.

It had all happened in a couple of seconds, and I hadn't had time to watch the skinny guy called Cafferty. I needn't have worried about him. He stood flattened against the wall, his eyes popping. I looked around the room. At one end a sliding panel was open

revealing a narrow closet-like enclosure. I saw shelves containing a dozen brown paper wrapped packages, and on the floor by the door was a pile of a dozen more. If the packages contained what I thought they did, Rose Sharon had not been lying.

Crispin lay very still along the wall, his legs bent under him. As I stooped over Helen Caxton, she opened her eyes and turned her head towards me. She lay on her back, and I could see no blood, but I knew that Crispin's bullet, intended for me, had got her in the back.

I said, "Take it easy. We'll have a doctor here in a minute."

But she wasn't looking at me. She was looking behind me, and there was a queer smile on her face. I started to turn, but I wasn't fast enough. I heard the blast of a gun, and something slugged me in the back, high up, and my face hit the floor. I rolled over, brought up my .38, and squeezed the trigger. I got to one elbow, fired again, aiming blindly in the direction of the closet entrance. Through a haze of smoke I saw the kid, Eugene, hanging on to the doorway, a smoking gun in his hand dangling uselessly at his side. My head cleared a little, and I saw him hanging there, half in and half out of the closet, his blond hair looped in long strands over his face, his mouth working convulsively. I watched him until he hit the floor, and then I closed my eyes and stretched out. The floor felt nice and soft.

I HEARD a noise. I opened my eyes and saw the skinny guy sneaking for the door on tip-toe. I tilted the muzzle of my .38 at him, said, "Get back in the corner." He got.

I managed to make it to my knees, got hold of the top of Crispin's desk, and pulled myself to my feet. As I did so, I saw an open book lying on the green blotter, and I thought that Luke Crispin would never finish *The African Queen,* would never know whether or not the cockney engineer and the missionary's daughter accomplished the destruction of the *Konigin Luise.*

The skinny guy made a motion, and I waved the gun at him, said, "Tut, tut," and he stood still again, the palms of his hands pressed against the wall. Helen Caxton lay with her eyes closed, but I could hear her heavy breathing.

I became aware of a confused murmur of sound from outside the office, and then I heard heavy footsteps pounding down the hall. I braced myself against the desk and leveled my .38. Somebody banged on the door, and a voice shouted, "Open up!"

I started to say, "Go to ———," and then the room began to swing in wide looping circles, and I felt myself slipping from the desk. I hit the floor just as the door splintered inward, and I looked up at the big form of Chief Archibald. I tried to raise my gun, but it was too heavy, and the room began to spin faster and faster. Then I guess I passed out.

CHAPTER XII

I WAS out maybe five minutes. When I opened my eyes I was lying on the floor in front of the desk. The Chief was squatted opposite me and he was ripping the wrapping off of one of the packages on the floor. Somebody had taken my gun, and the room was filled with cops.

I said, weakly, "Hi, Chief."

He turned around, got to his feet. He looked grim, and for once he wasn't chewing tobacco. "Bennett," he said, "I might have known I'd find you in this rat's nest."

I didn't feel much like talking, but I said, "I'm sorry about your pal Crispin, but he wanted to play rough."

The Chief said, "What do you mean, pal? He ain't no pal of mine. Who do you think raided this joint tonight? —the Boy Scouts?"

I got to my feet slowly, pulled myself around the desk, and flopped into Crispin's chair. I felt pretty shaky, and my back was hurting to beat hell. I couldn't move my left arm. The Chief was watching me closely. "Raid?" I said. "Pardon me, but when did you raid this joint—before or after the stick-up? The last I knew a couple of hoods were lining up the customers for the take."

"Stick-up!" he snorted. "Those were *my* men. I hired 'em special for this job. Too many of the boys on the regular force was taking Crispin's money. I'm gonna change all that—now that Caxton's gone. I don't mind telling you that he was holding me back. He and Crispin was thick as molasses. I figured he was getting a cut from Crispin. I didn't know who I could trust. Caxton ordered a couple of raids, to make it look good, but we never found anything. Crispin was always well tipped off. The pay-off came when he hired you. I still don't get that. I figured if you was working for Caxton, you was in with Crispin, too. And after Caxton was killed I didn't want you messing around when I went gunning for Crispin."

"So you framed me," I said.

He grinned. It didn't look natural. His broad red face seemed to crack. He said, "That skinny guy we found in here spilled his guts. He told about you plugging Crispin and the kid. I figure if you did that, you can't be all bad."

"Thanks, Chief," I said. "We should have gotten together."

"Dammit," he said, "how was I to know? I still don't see what in hell Caxton hired you for—or maybe he didn't hire you?"

I sighed. "Yes, he hired me. I think maybe I can explain it." For the first time I noticed that the bodies of Crispin and Eugene were gone. Helen Caxton had been taken away, too. All that remained were a few bullet holes in the walls, and some puddles of drying blood.

The Chief saw me looking. "Two of them went to the morgue," he said. "The girl was still living. We took her to the hospital."

"What about me?" I complained.

His face cracked into a grin again. "You looked tough. Doc said there was no rush about you. All you got is a busted collar bone."

"That's just swell," I said. "A couple more jobs like this, and I'll have to retire. Did you know about the dope?"

"Yeah, but I couldn't prove it. We was getting a lot of hop-heads in the jug down town—local people. I already called the F.B.I., in Cleveland. They can take it from here."

"What about Braithwaite?" I asked. "Did he get away?"

"No-sir-ee. We caught him outside trying to make a break with another guy in a car with a Chicago license. They already had some of the nose-candy loaded. I figure this Chicago guy intended taking the whole load tonight."

"One other thing—that list Caxton had. Did you get it?"

"Yep. I figured it was none of your business. Nobody on it but me and a couple of cops he couldn't buy—and one or two members of the City Council." He took a folded paper from an inside pocket and handed it to me. I glanced at it, handed it back.

"Okay, Chief. I just wondered."

WITH my good arm I began to pull open the drawers in Crispin's desk. In the bottom drawer on the right I found a half-filled bottle of rye. "It's rye, Chief," I said, "but I'm going to have a slug anyhow. Join me?"

Ain't you got no feelings?" the Chief asked. "Kill a man, and then drink his likker."

I passed the bottle to the Chief, and he tilted it to his mouth. I watched, fascinated, as it gurgled down his throat. Finally he stopped and handed the bottle to me. I looked at the low level of the remaining whisky, said, "Thanks," and took a couple of swallows myself. It perked me up a little. I said, "Who killed Caxton?"

"Crispin had it done, of course. We got some of the slugs, and I figure we'll find the gun around here someplace."

"Maybe you'll find the tommy gun that done the shooting," I said, "but there's more to it than that."

"How do you figure?"

"Let's go to the hospital. I want to talk to Helen Caxton."

I got to my feet. My back hurt pretty bad, and I couldn't use my left hand, but I figured I could make it all right. The Chief and I went outside, climbed into a squad car, and a cop drove us to the hospital. They had Helen Caxton in a private room, and a doctor met us at the door. "Miss Caxton's condition is pretty bad," he said. "She's conscious, but don't talk too long."

The Chief jerked his thumb at me. "Doc, how about taking care of him—while we talk? He's got a busted collar bone."

The doctor said, "All right."

The Chief helped me off with my coat and shirt, and we went in, the doctor following us. Helen Caxton lay with her eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. I sat in a chair by her side, and the Chief stood at the foot of the bed. I said, "Can you hear me? We want to ask a few questions."

She nodded slightly without taking her eyes from the ceiling.

I said, "Luke Crispin is dead."

She made no motion, but two tears slid down her cheeks.

"You killed Rose Sharon?" I asked.

Her voice was low. I had to lean forward to hear her. "Yes, I killed her. She was in love with Luke, and she betrayed him. I followed her to your hotel. I knew she was betraying him to you—because of me. I followed her, and I killed her. I'm glad."

The Chief said, in a low voice, "I'll be damned."

I said to Helen Caxton, "After I left your home this evening you called Crispin and told him I was still in town. That's why he sent a car after me and tried to kill me on the boulevard. Is that right?"

She said, "Yes. But I'm afraid Eugene's aim was poor."

THE doctor was swabbing at my back, high up, where the kid's slug had caught me. He said, "You're lucky. The bullet went clear through. Collar bone is shattered, and I want some X-Rays. See me at the office tomorrow. Can't use a splint. Have to immobilize your arm."

I said, "Okay, Doc," and I turned back to Helen Caxton, said, "Miss Caxton?"

She had closed her eyes, but she opened them again. There was a faint smile on her lips. "Yes?" she said in a whisper.

"Isn't it true that you raised the blind in your father's office yesterday as a signal to the men on the roof of the Y.M.C.A. that I was hired by your

father to get Crispin? When I first went in your father's office, the blind was drawn. When I returned after the shooting, it was up. Didn't you raise the blind not only to signal them, but also to give them clear vision?"

She had closed her eyes again. I waited. Presently she said, her eyes still closed. "Yes. That's right. But he wasn't my father. He was my step-father. I hated him."

"Why?"

"Why?" Her mouth was suddenly thin and hard. "Because he married my mother—for her money. And because he was in love with me. Anyhow, he called it love. My mother was older than he. He treated her badly. And he wouldn't leave me alone. My mother knew it, but she loved him too. I met Luke. We fell in love, and my step-father found out about it—last week. He was jealous—crazy jealous. Then he wanted Luke out of the way. That's why he hired you. Luke was paying my step-father to keep the police from bothering—it was part of the deal between them. But that meant nothing to him when he found out about Luke and me. He taunted me about hiring you, and that is why I went to his office yesterday afternoon—to see if you had really arrived. After you left, and I knew that my step-father hadn't been bluffing, I signalled Eugene across the street. He was waiting. I thought that after my step-father was dead you would go away, and that everything would be all right. But it wasn't all right. You stayed. And now Luke is dead. I want to die too."

I looked at the Chief, and he shook his head slowly. The doctor stopped fussing with me. He leaned over and felt Helen Caxton's pulse. Her eyes were open, but her face had taken on a queer pallor. The doctor looked at me, his face expressionless. Helen Caxton turned her face away from us, and a deep sigh escaped her. The doctor nodded his head, and pulled up the sheet.

"She's got her wish," the doctor said.

CHAPTER XIII

After the doctor had finished with me, the Chief took me down to the flop house on the lake front, and he sent a cop in after my stuff. I paid my bill. Another old pappy was on duty, and he said, "Thank you, Mr. Doakes," and the Chief grinned.

I got out of the squad car in front of the Hotel *Erie*, said, "Thanks. See you in the morning. I'm leaving for New York on the noon train." And then I remembered something. "Hey, Chief, maybe we ought to take up a collection to buy the doorman here some new glasses."

The Chief coughed. "Maybe we ought to, at that. But he was sure he saw you drive away with that girl last night. I questioned him very carefully about it."

"Sure, sure," I grinned. And then I remembered something else. With my one good arm I took out my wallet, and handed him the two grand Crispin had given me. "Here. Give this to the family of that taxi driver they got. I'm sorry it isn't more."

The Chief took it, his face expressionless. "Okay. I'll sure see they get it—I happen to know they can use it." He shook my hand solemnly.

I went into the hotel. They didn't give me the same room, but as I undressed it seemed to me that I could smell the faint perfume of Rose Sharon.

THE END.

★ ★ ★

MODERN BLUEBEARD

By H. R. STANTON

HIS real name was Charlie Demers of Fall River, Massachusetts. But he changed his name each time he visited a new town and acquired a new wife. Like Bluebeard of old, he married six wives, and he was about to marry a seventh when the Federal Bureau of Investigation stepped in. But unlike Bluebeard he did not murder his wives. He just got them with child, took their money, and left them.

Perhaps he was compensating for his unattractiveness. He was only five feet one, bald and fat. He wore a Van Dyke beard at times, and a bland smile.

At seventeen he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for burglary. Later he was paroled in the custody of a citizen of Schenectady who gave him a job, and whom he soon afterwards attempted to blackmail. In 1917 he deserted the United States army, and enlisted in the Canadian army in which he seemed to have made a good record. Immediately after the war ended, he returned to Iowa acting as an amnesia victim. But by 1922 he regained his memory, went back to Fall River, and married an eighteen-year-old girl who is believed to be his first and only wife.

During his first few months of marriage, he followed the paths of virtue. He held jobs with several furniture stores and showed a capacity for efficient work. But this way of life didn't last long. Finding himself in the employ of an organization that sold its furniture on the installment plan, he deviated from the straight path and reported that he made far more sales than he actually did. After collecting the commissions he didn't earn, he disappeared. Mrs. Demers went into the furniture business on her own. After making some money, she sold the business and returned to her family. At that time Demers, aware of her money, came back to her, used her money, got her with child, and departed with all of her money.

The following December, 1931, Demers sat on a bus beside a Miss Vivian Dorchester, aged twenty-three. Introducing himself as a Dr. C. P. Van Blarcom, representative of a New York City medical company, he became friendly with the girl and learned that she was headed for her home at Marion, Illinois. He said that he had hoped to hire a car at Marion to take him to Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to perform a difficult type of operation. It wasn't long before Miss Dorchester agreed to drive him there in her car. So together they drove to Memphis and then to New Orleans. In Aliceville, Alabama, they married, and then spent the next few weeks traveling from town to town where Dr. Blarcom had to operate. At Houston, Texas, Dr. Blarcom left his bride while she was still asleep; and she never heard from him after that. She went to court and sued him for divorce, and was awarded $100 a month alimony which she never received.

CHANGING his name to Reverend Maurice Pierrepont, Demers returned to Houston and conducted religious revivals. Soon he became well acquainted with Miss Alice Gray. He married her and took her to Westlake, where he continued to promote his revivalist racket. There he and Alice lived with a couple who believed him when he said that he had formerly been a physician. They agreed to lend him $250 in order for him to recover his surgical instruments that in an off moment he had buried in Mexico. Explaining his presence in Mexico, he confided to them that he was French by birth, that his real name was Arthur Adolph DeBussey DeBougainville, and that he had been sent by France to Mexico City as a diplomatic officer. He left his wife pregnant, took the money and never returned.

Introducing himself as a Britisher in Detroit, he continued with his religious revival work. He made love to a girl evangelist who refused to reciprocate. So he stole her Bibles and went to Des Moines. But the girl followed him, had him arrested, and got back her Bibles.

Carrying on his religious activities in Birmingham, Alabama, he met Helen Sawyer, a singer in the church, and married her. Six months before her child was born, he left her. Having expressed to the girl's family his desire to return to his first profession—bacteriology, he talked them into advancing him $1000 to enable him to begin. Taking the money he left, never to return.

In Santa Barbara he became Reverend Courney Darling. There he married a woman pastor. Within a short time he talked a female member of the church into lending him $1,600. He absconded with it, and Mrs. Darling never heard from him since.

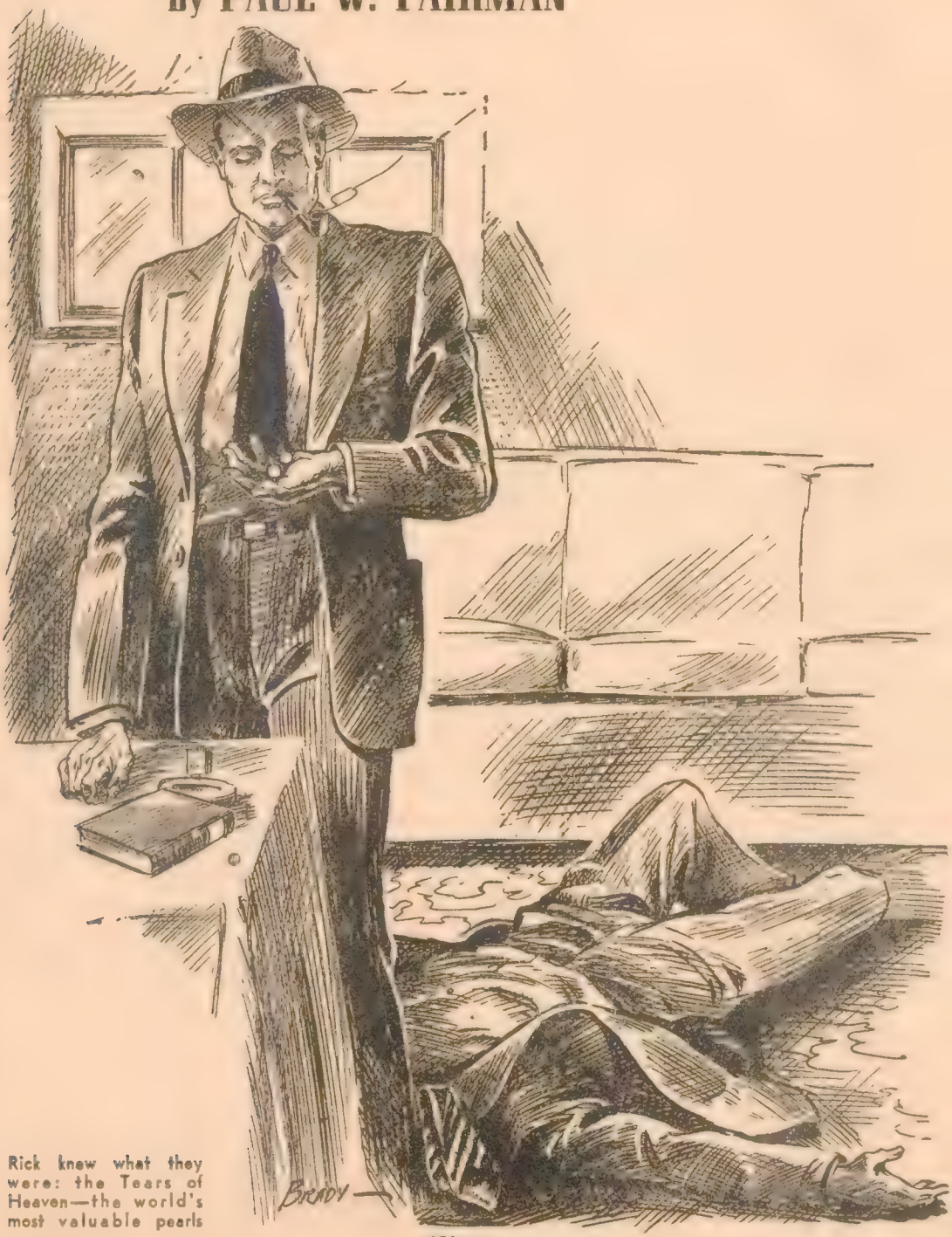
As Reverend Courtney Gouthey he conducted services in Corpus Christi, Texas. After about three weeks there he married Miss Clo Avery, aged twenty-one, and until September 22 traveled through Texas with her and held revival meetings. Then selling his car for $410, he left her. But this "marriage" resulted in no children.

In the meantime Helen Sawyer's parents contacted the law. The G-men immediately began to investigate and slowly succeeded in collecting the foregoing biography. Subsequently in 1936 they sent out a warrant for the arrest of Demers along with his photograph, fingerprints, physical description, and criminal record.

Two years later a woman who worked in a bank at Deadwood, South Dakota, entered a furniture store with her husband, and was suddenly struck by the familiar appearance of the clerk who waited on her. Noting his exact resemblance to the photograph on the circular, she returned to her office and made sure of her findings, comparing feature to feature. Then she notified the Chief of Police who arrested the clerk without any difficulty, and presented him to the F. B. I.

LATE RAIN

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN



Rick knew what they were: the Tears of Heaven—the world's most valuable pearls

In his line, Rick Mason thought he had met the worst people imaginable. But then he ran into Spider Pelle . . . .

STANDING beside Crandell, Rick Mason watched the coffin go down into the grave. It went slowly and smoothly, and pretty soon it was out of sight. The two men put their hats back on to keep the rain out of their hair.

"Too bad," Crandell said. Rick didn't say anything. Then they turned away and started toward the gate, where Rick's car was parked. As they walked, Rick thought: This is the way it always ends—in a cemetery. Smart people doing a lot of smart things to get what they want. Everybody overflowing with brains but the undertaker. He doesn't have to be clever. He just sits back and waits, and eventually they all come to him.

It was late afternoon, and chilly. Rick shivered under his topcoat, and wasn't sorry to be going away from there. No place is more dismal than a graveyard in the rain.

Graveyard in the rain, Rick thought. La-de-da-de-da. Nice lilt for some lamebrain to gargle over the radio. He'd write it up in a song and make a million dollars. Then he'd get out of this damn sleuthing racket.

Silly.

Rick turned his mind away, and looked at his wrist watch. The little black hands said three-fifteen. Subtract seven days from three-fifteen, he thought, and you've got a week. A hell of a lot can happen in a week. Things like life and death, and telephones ringing. Take off seven days and that's what you had—a telephone ringing. It had started that way. . . .

RICK had been lounging all day in a robe and slippers, in his near North Side apartment, and had been thinking lazily about going out for an early dinner. The ringing of the phone had been a distinct annoyance.

Rick ignored it for a while, before he got up from his chair and went over and picked it up. He said, "Mason," and Crandell's voice slammed back into his ear: "We've been taken!" Crandell yelped. "There's hell to pay. Snap into it and get down here!" That was Crandell. Don't do it today. Do it yesterday.

Rick yawned and cradled the phone without answering, because Crandell was already gone. He rubbed his eyes —bleary from reading—and slipped out of his robe.

He had a rather amazing face on top of his slim six-foot body. Eyes too far apart, too icy gray; nose too short and too flat, and a mouth much too large. Yet, in assembly, his features could not be called ugly. Most women considered him handsome. Most men were instinctively afraid of him. He could have been twenty-five—thirty—thirty-five. It was hard to tell.

He took his time with showering and dressing. He donned hat and coat and, before leaving the apartment, he stopped to read the last three pages of the mystery novel he'd plowed three quarters of the way through, during the day. He left the apartment, feeling quite satisfied with himself. He thought it was that sweet little old lady all the time. He went down three floors to the street, and backed his

Packard roadster out of the lot next to the building, reserved for tenants. He made a leisurely trip downtown.

LACEY CRANDELL'S world was bounded by the four walls of his office. So far as he was concerned, nothing of interest lay beyond. No one lived out there except a pack of thieves, who were forever trying to do Global Indemnity out of some hard-earned dollars. Frauds stalked the earth, in company with other frauds. Embezzlement and arson were skills taught in schools. Crandell ran a finger under the wilted collar, which was striving to hold itself together around his neck, and said, "You sure took your sweet time."

Rick Mason sat down and cocked a foot on Crandell's desk. He ignored the greeting. Crandell rummaged around and came up with a sheet of paper. There were some notations on it. He looked at the notations and said, "We've got grief."

"Quit repeating yourself," Rick said.

Crandell frowned. He was a little round man, with a little round body and a little round head. As he held the paper up, his fingers looked like little round balls, stuck together at the joints.

"You read about the Harlow killing?"

Rick thought for a moment, and said he had. "A stickup in front of their house on Lakeview Avenue, wasn't it? Harlow and his wife were shot down in cold blood. Some heister gone trigger happy. That was Monday night, I believe. They picked up Spider Pelle and held him a couple of days, but I hear he's out again."

Crandell nodded, then screwed up his eyes and studied the sheet of paper. "There's been a new development; a whale of a development. Harlow, it seems, bought his wife a couple of pearls about five years ago. Very sweet pearls they were, too. Out of the collection of the old Russian Czar, it was rumored. Anyway, Global put a blanket theft and burglary plaster on them for a hundred and fifty thousand, and Harlow had them made into a pair of earrings for his wife." Crandell's face took on a very sad expression. "We got a report this afternoon that the earrings were lifted during the stickup."

Rick Mason looked thoughtfully at Crandell's third chin. "This is Thursday. Did it take them four days to find it out?"

"There's an angle. Harlow never let his wife wear the damn things in public. He had a couple of dummies made for that. Both sets were kept in a wall safe in her bedroom, in two different cases. During the excitement following the killing, I guess nobody paid much attention to the fact that Mrs. Harlow's earrings had been stripped off. The dummies were only worth a couple hundred bucks. But today, during a routine checkup, they opened the safe and found that the fakes were still there. The Czar's little treasures were gone."

Rick said, "Four days. That's ducky. You can go from here to China and back in four days. What's the setup? Who the hell *was* Harlow?"

"An inventor, worth over a million. He dreamed up an oil cracking process and cleaned up by leasing it to the big companies. There's a daughter—Lorelei—about twenty-eight, a butler, maid and chauffeur. You'll find all that dope in our files. They were closely checked before we issued the policy, and Harlow was required to get our okay whenever he changed his help. Also, there's a confidential secretary to Harlow—a Grant Dickson. He's the one that reported the theft. I told

him you'd get in touch with him."

"Those pearls will probably go into hiding and stay there until we're old men, what with a murder rap tied to them."

Crandell leaned forward and dripped some sweat on the desk.

"Now don't go building up mental hurdles for yourself. We want those oyster eggs back, and I'm leaning on you but plenty. Just don't kill anybody, that's all."

Rick yawned and put his foot back on the floor. He straightened his hat and stood up. "I'll give it some thought," he said, and started toward the door. "So long, Fat Stuff," he called over his shoulder.

"Keep me posted," Crandell called. "And don't call me Fat Stuff."

Rick did not hear the last. He had closed the door behind him.

RICK MASON braked his Packard in front of a big red house on Lakeview Avenue, got out and went up on the porch and pushed the doorbell. A long minute passed before the door was opened by a butler with a face older than time. Rick asked for Miss Lorelei Harlow. Miss Harlow was not in. "Are you one of the newspaper people?" the butler asked fearfully. Rick said that he wasn't.

The butler looked relieved and said, "You might find her at the Sky-Line Club." His tone and expression said more. They said that Miss Lorelei certainly did not belong at a place of dim reputation like the Sky-Line Club, and that the butler was worried about it. He added that he thought the club was somewhere on Rush Street.

Mason went out and got into his car and started south. The butler watched with anxious eyes until the Packard pulled off Lakeview Avenue onto the Outer Drive.

The Sky-Line Club wasn't a club and it wasn't on the sky line. It was a tavern on Rush Street near the river, and Rick had to walk down five steps from the high sidewalk in order to reach the blue, windowless door.

Inside, he found a long narrow room. Otherwise, the place looked exactly like five thousand other taverns from Seventy-ninth Street to Howard.

The afternoon lull was in full swing. As Rick entered, a youth, thin enough to bathe in a fountain pen and seated at the bar close to the door, swiveled his head around on a pipestem neck and gave the detective a blank look, out of dead-black, lustreless eyes. The bartender was leaning on a beer spigot, reading the Racing Form.

The girl, seated at the far end of the bar, didn't look up. She sat staring at a Martini glass, held between the palms of her long, tapering hands. She was as motionless as the stool she sat on. She remained motionless as Rick Mason walked up to her and said, "I'm looking for Miss Harlow—Lorelei Harlow."

The girl's lips moved. They said, "Go away—please."

Rick climbed up on the high stool beside her and motioned to the bartender. The bartender didn't feel like serving customers. He felt like reading the Racing Form. He put the sheet down grudgingly and moved toward Rick.

"Bourbon—straight. Water chaser and a Martini," Rick told him. The bartender thought it over and decided it was all right. He moved away.

Rick turned toward the girl and said, "My name is Mason. I represent the Global Insurance Company. We insured some pearls for your father. A matter of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

The girl said. "Tell your company

they can keep the money. I don't want it. I didn't report the theft of the pearls. I'd rather not hear about it or talk about it."

She had honey-colored hair, a rather long face, and full red lips. She wore a light blue suit with brown piping on all the edges and around the breast pockets. Rick, looking at her in the mirror behind the bar, conceded that she would be classed as beautiful.

For the first time, she raised her eyes—large green eyes, and looked at Rick's image, with an expression that was really no expression at all. Her skin was flawless, and on her face was a brittle, transparent, alcoholic glaze. Rick could see that she was far from sober.

THE bartender brought her a new Martini and took the empty glass away. He came back and put some water and a shot glass in front of Rick. He filled the glass expertly, with one long tilt of a nozzled bottle. He returned the bottle to the shelf and shuffled back to his Racing Form.

"I understand how you feel," Rick said gently, "and I'm sorry that you have to be annoyed this way. But when your father insured those pearls he did it for protection—your protection as much as his. He—"

Lorelei Harlow interrupted him, in a flat, faraway voice.

"The Pearls of Heaven, they were called; Mother said there was a legend about them. They were supposed to have been torn from the gates of Heaven by Lucifer, as he fell from grace. It was a nice legend. Mother loved them."

Rick watched Lorelei Harlow raise the Martini glass to her lips. When she lowered it, the contents was lessened by half.

Rick said, "I know that memories like that must hurt now—a lot. Only time will help. Time and justice finally done."

She turned her head and her green eyes looked straight into his. He thought of two tigers, crouching and motionless, their tails twitching. An odd thing to think about.

Rick Mason discovered something else, also. He found that Lorelei Harlow's face was merely beautiful or nerve tingling, depending on how you looked at it and what you saw going on behind her eyes. He raised the shot glass and tossed off the bourbon, ignoring the water.

He set the glass down, and Lorelei Harlow said, almost in a whisper:

"Justice? There is another term I like much better. Vengeance."

"I think I know what you mean."

"I don't think you do. Did you ever see your mother and father lying dead on the sidewalk—shot down like dogs? My folks were good people. Honest, law-abiding people. They didn't deserve to be killed like rats in the gutter. I—I saw them lying there."

A voice behind them said, "Lorelei—please!"

Rick Mason turned immediately. Lorelei Harlow finished her Martini first.

The man standing there was young—not more than twenty-five, Rick judged. His hat was in his hand. He had black, soft, wavy hair, and eye lashes long enough to hang a pair of pants on. The hand he laid on Lorelei Harlow's shoulder was as soft and smooth as the hand of a woman. His nails were done in colorless polish. He had even white teeth, full lips. His eyes were clear blue, and when they looked at Lorelei Harlow, they were the hungriest eyes Rick had ever seen.

Lorelei Harlow said, "This is Mr. Mason, Grant. He's from Global In-

demnity, the people who insured the pearls. Mr. Mason—Grant Dickson." She spoke in a dull, flat, disinterested voice, then turned back to the bar.

GRANT DICKSON looked at Rick and got very impersonal. His look was not definitely hostile. Rather, he appraised Rick as a man might appraise a second-hand car—a man who had planned to buy a new one. He said: "Oh yes. I reported the theft yesterday afternoon. Did you have some questions?"

Grant Dickson's hand was still on Lorelei Harlow's shoulder. She shrugged slightly, and the hand fell off. Grant Dickson looked at it and put it in his pocket.

"There are a few points we might go over," Rick said.

"I'll call you tonight," Dickson answered, and Rick took a card from his vest. Grant Dickson accepted the card, put it away without looking at it.

"By the way," Dickson said, "this Spider Pelle—the suspect who was held for a couple of days by the police. They released him last night. Why?" A couple of baby wrinkles appeared in Dickson's forehead.

Rick Mason looked at the wrinkles and answered, "I'm afraid I wouldn't know. The police are very lax about keeping me posted. I imagine that they didn't have anything on him."

He said this while a door, marked OFFICE, was opening at the back of the tavern, and a man was coming through it. The newcomer had the air of a man just coming to work. The bartender put the Racing Form out of sight and began polishing the bar.

A flashy black and white checked suit walked up first, followed by the red carnation in the lapel. Then you saw the man. There was a freshly lit king-sized cigarette between the second and third fingers of his right hand, held negligently. His face was sharp enough to split kindling, and his neck was long enough to serve as a handle. He pointed his eyes at Lorelei Harlow and said. "Lay off that stuff, kid. It'll drive you whacky and it won't help a bit."

Lorelei Harlow looked in the mirror and replied, *"Et tu Brute?* This is Joe Heitz, Mr. Mason. He owns this sin den. If you ever go in the back room, stick to poker. The roulette table is crooked."

Heitz greeted Mason with a quick nod, as Lorelei began getting down off her stool. He held out his hand and Rick shook it. Rick was getting tired of shaking everybody's hand. He fished two dollars from his pocket and dropped them on the bar. He gave the two men a nod to divide evenly. Grant Dickson ignored it and said, "I'll drive you home, Lorelei." He said it hopefully.

"No, thanks," she answered wearily. "Mr. Mason is going my way." She started toward the front door without further words. Rick followed her, thinking the while of Lakeview avenue aristocrats chumming with sharp-eyed Rush Street gamblers, and how life was such a great big beautiful casual thing. The thin youth by the front door, spun his head on his neck again, as Lorelei and Mason went out.

The air on Rush Street was not fresh. Upon its bosom, it carried the odor of dead fish. Rick drew a lot of it into his lungs and held it there. Lorelei Harlow said, "I hope you don't mind driving me." Rick said that he didn't.

He rolled the Packard north on Michigan, past the Allerton, past shining windows, past newly lit neons. He kept on moving north—clipped a few seconds off the light at Oak Street.

Lorelei Harlow huddled against the

door, her hands thrust deep into coat pockets. "What will you do?" she asked. "I mean—how do detectives work? I suppose you go around questioning people—talking to fences."

Rick threw a quick glance against the lines of her still profile. "There aren't any fixed rules in this game. In fact you don't have to be very brilliant to make a living at it. The average thief isn't very smart or he wouldn't be a thief. Stolen jewelry can usually be bought back. That's why it's stolen in the first place."

The Packard turned into Lakeview Avenue and stopped in front of the big red house. Lorelei Harlow had gotten out, slammed the door and stood leaning against it before Rick could move. The bitterness in her eyes had not abated.

"I think I know who stole the Pearls of Heaven," she said. "And I think I know who killed my parents."

Rick rubbed his hand slowly around the edge of the steering wheel. After a moment of silence, he said, "Who?"

"You're a detective. Why don't you try finding out?"

She turned and walked rapidly toward the house, her long legs swinging back and forth against her skirt.

Rick sat staring through the windshield. He was thinking of Spider Pelle. Two years before, Rick had been instrumental in putting the Spider behind the thick walls of Joliet. It was to have been a five-year stretch. Spider was back on the street now. Evidently he had been a good boy. Rick gunned the Packard, went around the block and headed south.

RICK'S apartment was a stone's throw from Michigan and Chicago Avenues. It was a two-room, furnished place, held on a yearly lease. There was no lobby—no desk service. Rick parked in his usual place beside a green monstrosity of a Lincoln. He locked the Packard, went into the building and found the elevator waiting for him. He rode to the third floor, got out, and went five numbers down the hall to his own door. He unlocked the door and pushed it open. He wasn't careful. He didn't know that it was necessary. He didn't know that until he saw the legs.

They were the longest legs in the world—longer than any legs had a decent right to be. They were stretched comfortably out from a chair against the far wall. They were fastened to the torso of a youth—a youth thin enough to bathe in a fountain pen.

The youth had graduated from beer. He had promoted himself to Scotch, taken straight from a bottle he held in his right hand. The bottle was from Rick Mason's liquor cabinet, beside which the youth was sitting. The bottle was almost empty, but its contents had had no apparent effect upon the youth's left hand. The left hand was holding a shiny nickel-plated revolver, and it was as steady as a fourteen-inch gun on a battle ship. The revolver was pointed at Rick Mason's belt buckle.

The youth hiccoughed agreeably and said, "Come in, friend. Come in and sit down and let's be jolly."

Rick Mason entered the room slowly. He closed the door and stood leaning against it, his hands on the knob.

Legs waggled the revolver, reprovingly. "The mitts, pal. Both mitts. I like to see 'em."

Rick raised both hands to shoulder level. The thin youth eyed the results meditatively and stopped motioning with the gun. He called out, "Hey Ringer! You stayin' in there all night?" The thin youth leered amiably at Mason. "Ringer," he explained. "Bad stomach. Ulcers."

There was the swish of running

water from the bathroom. A minute later, a second man came out of the bedroom and stood spread-legged on the blue carpet. He was carrying a tumbler half full of whiskey, and his small, underfed body was weaving in a slow circle.

Long Legs grinned and said, "This is him, Ringer. Private snoop for the insurance company."

Ringer was small in every way, but his clothes were even smaller. His dark brown jacket would probably not have buttoned up the front. His arms stuck out of the sleeves like drinking straws out of a pop bottle. Tan slacks showed dirty sections of white socks above dirtier sport shoes.

"You boys move fast," Rick said softly. "Very fast."

Long Legs grinned some more. "He says we move fast, Ringer. Maybe we ought to show him some real fast moves. Maybe I ought to part his hair."

Ringer paid no attention to his companion. His bleary liquor-shot eyes were fixed on Rick. His expression was blankly thoughtful. "You got a gun, fella?" he asked.

"Sure, I've got a gun."

Ringer wandered across the room and slid his free hand under's Rick's left arm. He came up with a pearl-handled .32 automatic and tossed it through the doorway into the bedroom. He looked around uncertainly. He pointed to a chair. "Sit down," he said.

Long Legs giggled. "Yeah, sit down. You been runnin' around town like a blind bat out o' hell lookin' for some jewelry. You must be tired." Long Legs was almost overcome by his own wit. He giggled some more and the gun barrel moved slightly. About as far as a gentle breeze would move a cement post.

RICK took two steps to the right and sat down in an overstuffed chair that had blue ruffles around the bottom. He dropped his hands to the arms of the chair. No one objected. Ringer emptied his glass with one gulp. He opened his thin white hand and the glass dropped to the flood. He hadn't taken his eyes off Rick.

"It's being noised around that you're on the prowl for some hot stuff. And it's said that you're a pretty smart dick."

"You're doing the talking," Rick said.

The blank, thoughtful look tried to tear itself from Ringer's face, got nowhere, gave up. "We came up here friendly like, as a matter of fact. The gun is just that you might get the wrong idea."

"I might, at that."

Ringer suddenly tightened up and came across the room. He poked a pale index finger at Rick. There was plenty of dirt under the nail. "It's just that maybe we can talk things over, copper. Maybe you won't have to wear your feet down to the knees finding what you want. But first you gotta know some things. We ain't killers—see? Get that straight. You ain't dealing with fast-trigger boys." Ringer stopped, as though he were waiting for his brain to catch up with his mouth.

"A job once in a while—sure. And sometimes accidents happen. But a guy's got to eat. What the hell."

"Sure, a guy's got to eat," Rick agreed, "—and buy a little of the powder."

Ringer's hand came back and doubled into a fist. The long-legged youth got to his feet. It was like a man climbing up on stilts. He wasn't grinning anymore.

Ringer's lips worked back and forth across his teeth. Then he dropped his

hand limply.

"Careful, copper. I can rile up some. Maybe I do take a snootful once in a while. Is that any shine off your shoes?"

"None at all," Rick said. "Let's go back to where you're not a killer."

Ringer threw his mind into reverse and went back. Rick could almost hear the gears shifting. "Once in a while," Ringer said laboriously, "a guy gets in kind of deep. Sometimes things end up different than they start out."

"For Chrisake!" Long Legs snorted. "Quit blowin' off your face and start talkin'. Maybe you need another drink."

Rick stared at the little hophead, ignoring Long Legs. He said, "Look, chum. If you want to make a deal, take it some place where it'll do you some good. I'm an insurance dick. I look for things. Sometimes I find them and sometimes I don't, but I've got no pull with the city cops, and if I get out of line they'll slap me down just as quick as they will anybody else. So why don't you go peddle your bananas down at Central Station?"

The thought stung its way through Ringer's stupor. "And let them bounce us around under the lights? They'd like that. They'd like that a lot."

Rick shrugged. "Anyway I don't make deals with bindle stiffs."

Long Legs crossed the room in two steps. A high, whining sound came from his throat. "See, you damn fool? I told you. A cop's a cop. Stick out your neck and they'll throw a rope around it every time."

Ringer's lids came back off bloodshot eyes. His white nostrils flared out like fish gills. "I thought maybe you was a white guy," he growled. "A guy that ain't a city cop is sometimes a guy you can talk to."

Rick Mason looked steadily at Ringer.

"What are you scared of, punk?" he asked softly.

Long Legs was still holding the whiskey bottle. He said, "There's only one way to handle these guys. You gotta part their hair." He pushed the shiny revolver against Rick's chest. It scraped rib bone and swooshed some air from his lungs. Long Leg's eyes were hard, flat, vicious. He swung the bottle in a short upward arc. When it hit the side of Rick's head, there was a dull sound.

Rick pitched forward. As the blue carpet came up to meet him, bright silver flashed in his vision, and he knew that the shiny revolver was crashing against his jaw.

He went down into swimming green depths. All around him there were tigers — grinning and snapping their tails. They seemed to be very happy tigers.

Then there was nothing.

HE CAME to in an ocean, with waves breaking over his head. He was swallowing gallons of water, and he couldn't get his hands up to keep the water out of his nose. Then the breakers subsided and a mildly reproving voice asked: "You comfortable down there?" Rick opened his eyes.

He was looking up the legs of a pair of blue serge pants, past a vest covered paunch, and into a heavily eye-browed, not too friendly face. Above the face a brown derby was pushed far back on salt and pepper hair. The owner of the face, hat, and hair, was holding a glass in a large hand. The glass had lately held the ocean.

Rick grunted, "Hello, Muldoon," and struggled up to a sitting posture. He put a hand on the side of his head.

Muldoon was wide, solid, and not short. His suit looked as though it had

spent a few days in bed. He had large, comfortable shoes on big feet. His face was big, to fit the rest of him, but his mild brown, fawnlike eyes seemed out of place.

Rick got slowly to his feet, and Muldoon eyed him critically. "You looked better on the carpet," Muldoon said.

Rick gave him a weary look, and Muldoon went on. "I'm dropping in to chew the fat with you and I get no answer when I knock. So I try the door and it's open. I come in and what do I find? I find Rick Mason sleeps on the floor now. What goes?"

"Damned if I know. I came home and found a couple of altar boys had moved in. They seemed to want to tell me that they hadn't killed anybody, or, if they did, they didn't mean to. They almost murdered me trying to be convincing."

Muldoon's wide mouth twisted into a comfortable sneer. The sneer looked as though it belonged there all the time and had just gone out for a smoke and now it was back on duty.

Muldoon said lazily. "They called me in the front office the other day. They said, 'Muldoon, some of the taxpayers phoned in asking who shot Harlow and his wife. We don't like to seem stupid, so why don't you slouch around and see what you can find out?' I said I would."

Muldoon followed Rick into the bathroom, where Rick ran some cold water on a wash rag and laid it against his jaw. Muldoon stood in the doorway, almost filling it.

"But," he droned on, "I got to thinking, and said to myself: Why should I work when Mason works? He's after the same thing and he gets more money than I do."

"Quit it," Rick growled. "Go pour yourself a drink and bring me one."

MULDOON went out and visited the liquor cabinet and returned with two shot glasses filled with whiskey. "I had me a quick one out there," he said virtuously. He tossed off one of the drinks and handed the other to Rick. Rick let the liquor burn slowly down his throat. It felt good. Muldoon eyed his shot glass speculatively.

"Of course," he said, "I knew Global would pull you out of their bag to stooge back the lost pearls, so I ambled on up. That jaw hurts plenty—I hope."

Rick put some more cold water on the rag. Muldoon asked:

"Who sapped you?"

"Don't know."

"Ever see them before?"

"One."

"Where?"

"In a tavern."

"What tavern?"

"Sky-Line Club."

Muldoon made a sad sound with his lips. "Once a guy held out vital information on me," he said, "and so I threw him in the can. We didn't book him. Uhuh. We're too cagey. We just held him, but when his lawyer came a hunting, he wasn't there any more. He was in another can. We got lots of cans around town. Dozens of them." Muldoon poked an oversized thumb and forefinger into his vest pocket and came up with a toothpick. "When they finally caught up with this guy, he was a very old gent. An old gent with no soles on his shoes." Muldoon's eyes stopped being soft and fawn-like.

Rick examined his jaw in the mirror. "What makes you think I'm holding out on you?"

"Because you're smart. You're young and ambitious. You make your minutes count."

"Maybe I can use you for a reference some time."

"But another thing—and far more important: I don't like private dicks in general, and I don't like you in particular, so stay out of my hair. I'm going to crack this Harlow case and get me a promotion, and I don't want you goofing up the works—understand?"

"How's the jaw—coming down any?" Rick asked, twisting his head around.

"I'm just warning you, bud—just warning you," Muldoon said softly.

He turned and walked out. He left very quietly for a man of his size.

AFTER a while, Rick got out the phone book and looked up a number, and called the big red house on Lakeview Avenue. He asked for Lorelei Harlow. The butler said that Miss Harlow was not in. Miss Harlow, it seemed, didn't spend much time at home. Rick hung up.

He waited a moment before dialing Lacey Crandell.

Crandell was annoyed. That meant he was normal. He said, "It's about time. Where you been all day? What happened?"

"Not much. There are a couple of items I picked up about the late John Harlow this morning. The patent on his oil cracking process for intance. Remember that? It was a swell patent, but it ran out. Harlow hadn't had a dime coming in for over a year."

"Hmmm," Crandell observed sagely. "He had a wad though."

"Not any. The million was only a memory. Harlow loved the stock market."

While Crandell was thinking that over, Rick said so long and hung up. He turned and walked to the window. He stood looking out on the night city; upon the miracle wrought with a few wires and some stuff called electricity. He was suddenly weary, and he wondered if there wasn't a better way to make a living than lifting up rocks and watching twisted things go scuttling away toward other rocks.

Rick rubbed a hand along his jaw and thought of electricity again. They did lots of things with electricity. They put it in chairs for men to sit on.

Grant Dickson had promised to call. Dickson, Rick decided, was probably pretty busy about now, finding out some things he never knew before. Rick wondered some about Dickson. He wondered how his reflexes were and he wondered how fast the boy was on the uptake. Rick would know before long.

GRANT DICKSON called at nine-fifteen the following morning. His voice sounded husky, far off, a trifle bewildered. The voice didn't go with the soft hands and long eye-lashes Rick had seen in the Sky-Line Club.

"Sorry I didn't buzz you last night," Dickson began, "but some things came up."

Rick said it was all right. Any important things?

"Well—yes," Dickson laughed lightly, nervously. "You see, it's all been a mistake. A stupid mistake. The pearls weren't lost at all. They were in the house all the time. We found them last night."

"Under the bed no doubt."

"What? Oh—Ha-ha." Dickson didn't think it was funny. His laugh said so. "No, but that doesn't really matter does it? I mean where they were found. You can just call up your people and tell them that the claim is withdrawn. Or I'll do it if you wish."

"I'll be glad to do it—provided I can see the pearls—now. I'll meet you anywhere you say in fifteen minutes. Up on Lakeview Avenue?"

Dickson's voice became stiff. "I can't see that that's necessary. I said the pearls were found. Isn't my word

good?"

Rick's gray eyes bored a hole in the wall in front of him.

"No," he said.

A moment of silence cracked across the phone wires like a whip while Dickson got mad. "Now listen, Mason—"

"Suppose you listen. You aren't dealing with school children, pal. In taverns I don't show off to advantage, so you're excused for rating me as a trifle stupid. You haven't got the pearls and you can't show them to me. Right?"

"That's none of your damn business. I said the claim was withdrawn. Isn't that enough?"

Rick rubbed his jaw tenderly with his free hand, and his voice got very patient:

"Let's put it this way. Since I talked to you last, somebody contacted you with some information you didn't like —something you want to cover up. I don't blame you for that particularly, but you're playing with some pretty nasty, vicious characters, who don't give a dime for your life or anybody else's. You're diving in blind and you're going to get hurt. How about letting me handle it. That's my business."

Grant Dickson's answer came quickly. "Why the hell don't you mind your own business? I said the claim was withdrawn. If you have to see the pearls to make it official, be at Harlow's house at eleven o'clock tonight and I'll show them to you."

The banging of a receiver almost cracked Rick's eardrum. Rick hung up and went back to his coffee. He drank it slowly, but the tight look on his face indicated that he wasn't enjoying it very much. After a while he went back to the phone and called Lacey Crandell.

Crandell said, "My my. So early in the morning. I thought you got up with the afternoon papers."

"Papers," Rick returned. "That's what I wanted to ask you about. Did you read the news stories about Spider Pelle when they picked him up on suspicion for the Harlow job?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"They mentioned where the cops found him, didn't they? Some hotel."

"The Lewis, on Dearborn Street. But what do you care? He was clean wasn't he?"

"Could be, but I haven't seen the Spider for a long time. Maybe I'm getting lonesome."

Crandell said, "Nuts, how about some action?"

Rick looked thoughtful as he cradled the phone.

THE Lewis was a dirty trap on Dearborn Street near the river, with maid service once a week and no questions asked. The neighborhood, under a perpetual smoke pall, was cheap, squalid, depressing.

Rick Mason got out of the Packard and went into the ancient lobby and stood before a desk which was nothing more than a counter bracketed into the wall at one end and held up on spindly legs at the other. There was no one behind the desk—no one in sight. Rick tapped what had once been a bright new brass bell. He waited a while before an old man hobbled through a doorway at the left end of the desk. The old man smelled of fresh coffee. He had a thin cadaverous face and red watery eyes, in which there was the vacant childish look of old age. He leaned over the desk and peered up into Rick's face.

Rick asked, "Do you have a Pelle here? A Sam Pelle, or anyone with a name that sounds like that?"

The old man thumbed laborously through a ledger on the desk. Finally he came to a name in the book, ran a

gnarled finger across it and looked up. "Yeah, S. Pelle. Been here two weeks. Want to see him?"

"That's right. I want to see him."

The old man turned to a rack of pigeon holes on the walls behind the desk. He turned back and leered triumphantly. "Not in. Key's in the box. Three seventeen." The smell of boiling coffee drifted through the doorway. The old man gave Rick an impatient look and hobbled off to see about it.

The stairway was against the south wall of the lobby. Rick went up very quietly, two steps at a time. He found the third floor right where it belonged, over the second, and walked down a narrow dingy hall until he came to a door upon which was tacked three tin letters making up 317. He tried the knob. The door was locked. The third key on the chain he took from his pocket, slipped the catch. The door squeaked sharply as he pushed against it.

Rick stood briefly in the doorway, adjusting his eyes to the eternal dimness of an inside hotel room. The window, giving off an air vent, was closed, and had not been washed in twenty years. The air was thick enough to slice. Rick took off his hat and waved it gently back and forth in front of his face.

Against the window he could see the vague outline on an electric light cord, hanging from the center of the ceiling. An unshaded bulb was cold against his hand as he fumbled for the switch. His fingers closed on a chain hanging beside the bulb. He pulled it. Sharp, merciless light flooded the room. Rick went back and closed the door.

The walls were a sick green, except where the paint had chipped off, leaving naked plaster. Some artistically inclined pervert had drawn a few dirty pictures on the white spots. There was a chest of drawers against one wall, across the top of which were draped a pair of light blue trousers. Beside the chest of drawers was a doorway to a small closet housing a wash stand and a toilet bowl. A rumpled blue shirt had been wadded up and dropped on the toilet seat.

And it was a thousand to one that the trousers and shirt belonged to the man huddled on the big brass bed.

RICK MASON put his hat back on and pushed it off his forehead. He stared at the still figure, his straight lower lip protruding slightly. The ancient room clerk had been wrong. Spider Pelle was very much in. He would be in until the men with the meat wagon came to take him out.

Pelle's body was lying on its left side, with the head twisted around toward the ceiling. There was nothing wrong with the left side of the head, except the odd storm-blue complexion and the eye bulging too far out of its socket. And the only thing wrong with the right side was the fact that it had been completely caved in. It had been beaten, pounded and smashed with a blackjack, by someone who hadn't liked Spider Pelle very well. The blackjack lay on the bed beside the body. Blood had soaked a neat circle in the sheet around it.

Rick Mason stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes swinging methodically around the room. They took in the suitcase on the floor beside the chest of drawers. It was open. There were shirts, underwear and socks piled neatly at one end. At the other were dirty clothes tossed carelessly down. They were tossed down exactly the way the man who had been wearing them would do it.

Rick went over and began opening the drawer. He did it quietly, starting at the top and working down. Every

one was empty except the last. It contained the grandfather of all cockroaches. Rick watched grimly as the cockroach came out of the drawer like a man going over a high hurdle. It scuttled unnerringly toward the bathroom. Rick followed it.

There was another naked bulb over the washstand. Rick switched it on and looked at himself in the cracked mirror. He looked, for a while at his own gray eyes. His eyes were as gray as winter and now his face had grown as gray as his eyes. His mouth was a tight slit across the bottom of his face.

He went back out and stood in front of the chest of drawers, across which the inoffensive blue pants were spread. They looked pretty flat. Maybe they *had* been cleaned out. He realized suddenly that he had never wanted anything in his life so much as to find those pants empty.

But they weren't empty. There was a pocket knife which snapped open at the touch of a hidden button. There were a pair of dice with an extra set of deuces where the sixes should have been. And there was money. A wad of bills covered by a twenty. Spider Pelle had been in the dough, and whoever killed him hadn't wanted any part of it. Rick put everything back into the pockets and dropped the pants on the floor.

It was ten minutes later now, and Rick appeared to have grown quite fond of Spider Pelle's room. He stood there looking at the wall, with a dull expression on his face and a sick feeling in his stomach.

Finally Rick reached up and snapped off the light. He went over and opened the door a crack and looked out. There was no one in sight. His foot touched a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the floor. He picked it up, went out, closed the door, and hung the sign on the knob. He went down the stairs and out into the street. He met no one on the way.

The Packard looked lonely in the dusk. The steering wheel grinned at him through a windshield. He got in and drove north.

THERE were a half dozen people sitting at the bar in the Sky-Line Club when Rick entered. They were bent upon having a good time. They were going to have a good time if it killed them. Their somber expressions showed that they were working hard at it.

There was a different bartender on duty. He came over and gave Rick a made-to-order smile. He asked, "What'll you have?"

"Joe Heitz," Rick answered. "I understand he owns the joint. Where is he?"

The barkeep cocked a suspicious eye. He shrugged. "He went out about an hour ago. Said he'd be back. I dunno."

"Bourbon and gingerale," Rick said. "I'll wait for Joe."

Rick's watch read six-fifteen. Two hours and six drinks later it read eight-fifteen. There was quite a crowd in the club now, and people were beginning to drift back through the rear door. People with money in their pockets and larceny in their hearts. The bartender had long since stopped eyeing Rick suspiciously. Two hours in the Sky-Line Club and you were one of the boys.

Joe Heitz came in at eight-twenty-five. He would have gone right past, but Rich was off the stool with a hand on Heitz' arm.

"I've been waiting a hell of a while," Rick said. "There's a little matter. How about your office?"

Heitz was politely agreeable, though obviously bewildered. He said "Okay," and led Rick to the rear. He opened

the office door and went in. Rick followed, wondering whether a long shot was going to pay off.

Heitz snapped on a light, revealing luxurious furnishings, stripped off a screaming checked tweed topcoat, turned and smiled.

"There's a skinny kid," Rick said. "I saw him in here yesterday. And there's a pale little hophead in midget's clothing. Are they your boys?"

Joe Heitz slanted his eyes down a little too much and hesitated a shade too long. Rick knew the long shot had come through.

"No," Heitz answered. "They're not my boys."

"But they might do a job for you once in a while?"

Heitz shrugged. "They've booted a few wrong people out for me maybe, for beer money. But they aren't my boys. I don't need any boys around here."

"I want to see them now—right away. Where can I find them?"

Heitz started to say that he didn't know, but Rick stepped very close to him and cut in: "You've got a nice place here; you're making money, and I take it for granted you want things to go on as they are. Where can I find the boys?"

"I told you I didn't know." Joe Heitz' eyes were darkening.

"I was hoping you did," Rick said softly. He looked down at Heitz' chin —looked at it regretfully, and slammed a fist against it. He watched Heitz back-pedal across the room until the desk stopped him. When Heitz got to the desk Rick was there too.

He took Heitz by his five-dollar necktie and lifted him up.

"I'm looking for the boys," Rick said patiently.

Heitz' eyes were very light again. He said, "They've got a room. It's on Oak Street, east of State. A yellow building on the south side of the street. You can't miss it. They're in the basement on the left hand side."

Rick grinned stiffly and let go of the necktie. Joe Heitz straightened up and gave him a surly look; the kind of look a spoiled child would give its nurse. He fumbled with his tie. "You didn't have to act that way," he said. "I'd have told you. I'm not covering anybody."

"Sorry," Rick answered. "I'm impulsive."

Rick went out of the office, out of the Sky-Line Club. He got into the Packard and headed for Oak Street.

THE building had probably been yellow once, but it wasn't that way anymore. Years of grime streaked its bricks. But it was still the lightest building in the block. Rick parked, got out and went up the front walk. A dirty sign, posted on the small lawn, said he could have a kitchenette apartment if he wanted it—smart and modern. Rick doubted the description. He cut to his left, across the lawn to where a short flight of stairs led down to a basement door.

The door had a glass window in the top. A green shade was pulled down over the window. Yellow light traced a pattern, through cracks, on its surface. Rick drew his .32 automatic with his right hand. He knocked on the door with his left.

Nothing happened. Rick knocked again. There was a scuffling sound from within—then some more silence. Rick rattled the knob, and, instantly the shade was drawn back a half inch and an eye peeped out. The eye was withdrawn, a key clicked; the door swung open.

The door stopped swinging, halfway in. Rick took a step forward and stood,

balanced on his toes, on the door sill. He said, "Hello, Ringer."

Ringer was standing in the middle of the shabby room. There was a happy smile on his face—an almost ecstatic look. The paleness was gone. There were stars in his eyes. He said, "Hello copper. Come on in. We love company."

Rick smiled back—from his eyes down. He motioned with the automatic. "Your friend—behind the door. Tell him not to be bashful. Tell him to come out."

"He don't tell easy." Ringer laughed. "Maybe you better try it."

There were lumps of ice where Rick's eyes had been. He said, "Okay, I'll ask him."

Rick leaned hard against the panel, while his hand snaked around behind it and found a head of coarse hair. He braced himself from the ankles up and jerked hard. Then a lot of things happened very suddenly.

First, there was Long Leg's head, coming into view around the edge of the door. There were curses, loud and deep, and Long Legs helplessly flailing the air with a shiny revolver. There was Rick, jamming Long Leg's head down toward the floor. And there was the crunch of good solid bone, as Rick slammed the automatic against the base of Long Leg's skull.

Long Legs kept on going toward the floor. He hit it with his face, and seemed to balance on his nose for a split second, before his body collapsed limply. He lay very still, looking like a man who had gone to sleep while trying to eat a hole through the carpet.

Ringer eyed the inert body with interest. He licked his lips with a bright red tongue. He said, "Teddy was pretty smart. I didn't think anybody could do that to Teddy."

Rick put his heels back on the floor. "So his name was Teddy. I wondered about that."

"He was a nice boy," Ringer said.

"His legs were too long. Where's Grant Dickson?"

"And who the hell is Grant Dickson?"

"Don't be coy. He's the chump who thought he could make a deal with you. He was due here tonight, wasn't he?"

Ringer tossed his head gaily. "Oh, him. He's in the b e d r o o m. You wouldn't want to see him though. He's a mess. All bloody."

"Who did that?"

Ringer didn't seem to hear. He had a faraway look on his face. He appeared to be listening to something high in the air—something above the reach of ordinary ears.

Rick stepped forward and swung the flat of his hand hard against Ringer's jaw. "Who did that?"

Ringer's head snapped. He staggered, recovered his balance, smiled, as though he didn't feel the blow.

"He wanted some pearls," Ringer said dreamily. "He wanted s o m e pearls but he didn't have any money. Teddy got mad. Teddy used a knife."

"Where are the pearls he wanted?"

Ringer kept on smiling. Rick stepped close and buried a fist in Ringer's stomach. Ringer's mouth flew open. He doubled up. The color left his face. "Where are they?" Rick asked.

"No—pearls," Ringer gasped.

Rick pocketed his gun and went to work with both hands. He buried his fingers in Ringer's throat. While he shook Ringer, he had the cold feeling of shaking a rattlesnake.

Ringer's eyes rolled. Rick let go of his neck and threw another punch into his stomach.

Ringer wasn't hearing things now. He was too busy being sick.

Rick took him by the throat again.

He squeezed and Ringer turned gray as he struggled. When he stopped struggling, he t u r n e d blue. Rick loosened his grip. "This can go on all night," he said. "Where are they?"

Ringer moved his tongue, and some words slipped over it. "In Teddy's wallet. We—"

Ringer's mouth twisted into a savage grin. It was almost a happy grin as his hand came out of Rick's pocket, gripping the .32. He screamed thinly.

Rick pulled Ringer's slight body in close to his own, while he grasped Ringer's head in both hands. He hooked his fingers around the point of Ringer's chin and twisted sharply.

Ringer's whole body shuddered. His teeth sliced through his tongue as his head came around to face the wall behind him. The bones of his neck broke with a sound of gristle going through a meat grinder. The automatic dropped from his fingers. Rick loosed his hold and Ringer went down on top of the gun. Rick's hands dropped to his sides.

"Teddy didn't use the knife," Rick whispered, pulling a hand up and across his wet forehead. "You did."

Ringer didn't hear him. Rick turned away and walked through the inner door, into the bedroom.

THE bedroom was sparsely furnished. A battered dresser and a white enameled double bed. That was all. On the bed was a sheet. Grant Dickson lay on the sheet, stripped to the waist. His body was a mass of crimson slashes. He had been cut, gouged and gashed according to a plan. There had been ferocity in the plan, and a hideous, demented sadism. Red stains extended outward in all directions from the spot on which Grant Dickson was lying. Rick fought a quick battle with his senses and walked to the bed.

Dickson turned his eyes until they were on Rick. Under the long lashes they looked like the eyes of a woman. His lips opened, his face twisted, and his words were a whisper:

"I—I tried to cover it up—for her. You knew it was Mr. Harlow—arranged it."

Rick dropped on one knee beside the bed. His voice got thick. The skin on his face looked like tightly drawn parchment. "I ought to have my license pulled, kid. I let you walk into it."

"I want to tell you how it was—"

"Take it easy. I'll tell you, if it helps. Harlow arranged the stickup because he was broke and figured he could make a comeback in the stock market without selling the pearls. It had to be him because he was the only one who could have made the switch—"

"You've got to cover it up—for Lorelei." The whisper was thinned and as desperate as Dickson's clutching hand.

"You love her a hell of a lot, don't you?"

Dickson achieved a small smile. "I never had a chance. But you've got to—"

He didn't say any more. He looked at the ceiling. He kept on looking at the ceiling until Rick reached over and closed his eyes.

Rick got up finally, and went back into the other room. He knelt down beside Teddy, dug a hand into his hip pocket and brought out a black wallet. He opened it, hooked a finger inside and two balls of frozen fire dropped out into his palm.

The Pearls of Heaven. Rick looked at them dully, fingered them. In their depths, translated into fire, lay all the desires and dreams of men from the beginning of time. They were full of the breathtaking beauty of the un-

achievable. And they were full of blood, murder and death. They weren't the Pearls of Heaven at all. They were the Pearls of Hell, Rick thought—the best friends an undertaker ever had.

Rick dropped the earrings into his vest pocket and began a systematic search of the apartment. There wasn't much to be searched. He found what he was looking for within a few minutes. It was a black .45 automatic. The Harlows had been killed with a .45. Rick put the gun into his topcoat pocket.

He went over to the telephone and called Central Station. He asked for Sergeant Muldoon. Muldoon was busy. He told them where he was and said he wanted to see Muldoon—that Muldoon had better come over. He told them it would be a good idea if Muldoon came in a hell of a hurry. He cradled the phone and sat down to wait.

MULDOON came over in a hell of a hurry. It seemed no time at all before his oversized body was dwarfing everything else in the room. Rick didn't say anything and he didn't get up from his chair.

Muldoon looked down at Teddy. He looked at Ringer, then at Teddy again, and up at Rick. He moved softly to the bedroom door and looked in. He turned and said, "What kind of a slaughter house is this?"

Rick had been watching Muldoon carefully. Muldoon came over and stood in front of Rick's chair, towering above him. "What happened?" he asked quietly.

"This is what comes," Rick answered, "when an amateur tries to play detective. Dickson thought he had something on these two boys, so he came sleuthing. The little one was coked to the ears. He went to work on Dickson with a knife, just for the sheer love of it. He almost got me before I nailed him."

"But Dickson didn't have a thing," Muldoon pursued searchingly. "He just thought he did?"

"That's right. He just thought he did."

Muldoon's fist moved. It moved with the deceptive swiftness of a ham fastened to the end of a piston rod. It cracked against Rick's jaw and went on by, as Rick went over backwards. Rick's head hit the floor with a dull thud. Rick blinked and looked up at Muldoon with an expression that was unreadable.

This last didn't bother Muldoon. He wasn't interested in reading expressions. He said, "The only thing you're right about is the cokey going nuts with the knife. You're lying about the rest."

Rick got to his feet. He got up just in time to meet Muldoon's fist on its second trip around. Rick went down, shuddered, sat on the floor and wiped some blood from his chin.

"I warned you about gumming up my picture," Muldoon said amiably. "Maybe you think you're playing with toys, chum?"

Rick looked up. "I'm going to get back on my feet," he said, "and I wouldn't advise you to try that again." He pulled himself up and Muldoon suddenly got busy talking. He forgot to swing again. He said:

"I'll give you the facts, bright boy. I've got them all laid out, nice and neat. Harlow was flat. He needed cake money so he dreamed up a fake holdup. It had to be that way because he was the only one who could have switched the pearls on his wife. She usually wore the phoney ones. And he had to have a holdup because Mrs.

Harlow wouldn't have stood still for any funny business. Also, he didn't have the guts to ask her to sell them. The only hitch in the setup was these hopheads killing the Harlows."

Rick wiped some more blood from his chin.

"Harlow," Muldoon went on, "made the deal with these two torpedoes. No wonder he lost his dough if he didn't have any more brains than that. Anyway they came to you and tried to bargain.

"You turned them down, proving that you're a sap, too. Then they buzzed this Dickson and he tried to get the pearls back without giving them any money. That last is a guess, but it's a damn good one. Maybe they bumped him because he threatened to turn them in. Any comments?"

Rick had no comments.

"I'm working the case like a beaver and I get it all lined up. Now I come over here and find everybody dead. And I find you sitting on the corpses. I'm that put out, chum. I really am."

"Now I'll gab awhile," Rick said. "You've got nothing but a lot of theory that you can never prove. You can raise a lot of stink and hurt some people but that won't get you a promotion. You can throw me in the can but you'll still be a sergeant when I get out. On the other hand, I've got a different way to play it. Ride my horse and you're in. Follow this setup and you've got nothing."

"You got a different way! You can lie with the God-damn straightest face of anybody I ever met."

"Let me lay it out," Rick countered. "What have you got to lose?"

Muldoon scowled and began lumbering around the room. He stopped beside Ringer's body and pushed the head around with his toe. "This guy's neck's busted," he growled.

"Uhhuh. By the way, if you had everything sewed up, why didn't you pick up these sharpshooters? Couldn't you raise carfare to come out after them?"

Muldoon tugged at his collar. "Well, what if I didn't have a line on the gunners yet? I had the facts."

"And you're still young," Rick added drily.

Muldoon scowled again and held up a beefy finger.

"Ah—this setup of yours. I'm not saying what I'll do, but—"

Rick grinned back behind his face, where it didn't show. "Anything broken at the Lewis Hotel in the last six hours?" he asked

Muldoon turned, sharply. That's where Spider Pelle was holing up."

"You let the Spider go. Remember?"

"He was clean."

"Yeah? Let's drop over there."

THE old man behind the spindly desk at the Lewis Hotel was dozing fitfully. He awoke with a start as Muldoon smashed the bell with a casual hand. "The key to 317, pop," Muldoon said.

The old man looked at Muldoon and then at Rick. He seemed to vaguely remember Rick "317, ain't in," he bleated plaintively.

"Gimme the key, ya lug!" Muldoon roared, and the old man almost broke his back getting it out of the pigeon hole and onto the desk. He watched Muldoon follow Rick up the stairs. He shook his head sadly.

Rick stepped aside and Muldoon unlocked the door of 317. Rick followed Muldoon inside. Muldoon pulled on the light and Rick closed the door.

Spider Pelle was still dead. The window was still dirty, and nothing had changed except the air. It was thicker

now, and smelled worse.

Muldoon looked down at Spider and said, "Jesus! Who killed *him?*"

"For a guy with all the answers, you've got plenty of questions," Rick said. "Anyhow, what do you care? Maybe I did. This is one for the wastebasket. Will the D. A. give a damn *who* bumped him?"

Muldoon turned. His movement was a threat.

"I haven't said I'd go along with you yet," he growled. "There's some little matters like a gun that killed the Harlows—and a couple of pearl earrings."

"I hate people who have to be coaxed to play the piano," Rick said. "I think you'd better tell me you'll go along. I could change my mind too."

"Where's the stuff?" Muldoon asked. His manner was surly.

Rick walked to the bathroom. "I've got to go," he said as he closed the door. He was out a few moments later.

"You sure go quick," Muldoon said.

"Can it," Rick snapped. "Nobody's kidding anybody. You'll find the gun under the bathtub. And try the flush box of the toilet for the earrings." Rick started for the door. "I'm getting out of here before I throw up. So long—captain." Rick went down the stairs very slowly. Every bone in his body screamed for rest.

RICK MASON'S foot had been parked on Crandell's desk for quite a while. He looked gloomily at the toe of his shoe and said, "So that's that and you've got the pearls back and you're going to get a bill that'll knock your hat off."

Crandell frowned at the wall. "You took a lot of chances. I don't like that. You usually take too many chances."

"Then you ought to be used to it. By the way, you're taking a little trip with me tomorrow. You can see how the other half lives—or rather how they die."

"Where?"

"Grant Dickson's funeral. Tomorrow at eleven. I'll pick you up here at ten."

"Why the hell should we go to his funeral?" Crandell looked as though he really wondered why.

"Because he was a better man than either of us; because he had more guts by the foot than we've got by the mile. Because—because I say so. Any objections?"

Crandell gave it a little thought, but he couldn't find any. Then his mind drifted to something else. He said, "I suppose we'll never find out who killed the Spider. It's sort of like losing the last chapter."

Rick put his feet on the floor and got up.

"Just pretend that your subscription ran out," he said. He walked out of Crandell's office.

THE butler let Rick in the front door of the big red house on Lakeview Avenue. He told Rick that he could find Miss Harlow in the library. Rick said fine—he'd go in.

The library wasn't quite as large as the Chicago Stadium, and Rick had to look around for a while before he saw her. She was sitting by a window, gazing out into Lincoln Park across the street. Rick came up behind her. She heard him, looked up slowly. There was room on the longue beside her. Rick sat down.

For several minutes nothing was said. Lorelei Harlow sat straight and still. She didn't appear to be even breathing. There were dark lines under the green eyes. Rick looked into the eyes. The tigers seemed to have gone away.

Rick said, "Maybe you'd better tell me about it."

"Tell you about it?" A hint of panic whipped across her face.

"Yes. We can—we can call it a sort of confession. If you don't tell me the time will come when you'll be tempted to tell someone else. You won't be able to hold it in. That someone else may be the wrong person to confide in."

"How did you know?"

Rick wondered if there was relief in her voice.

"First, nothing was taken. Spider's money was still there. The place hadn't even been searched. That pointed to someone bent only on killing. Second, Spider was killed with a blackjack. Women use them sometimes. No man could have gotten close enough to Pelle to sap him. Pelle wasn't exactly a sleepy character. It all added up to a woman—a woman with vengeance in her heart."

Lorelei Harlow sat quiet for a time. Then she began to talk:

"When the police picked him up, I wasn't sure he'd killed mom and dad, but when they let him go, I had to find out. I've heard how wrong the police can be. So I called the Lewis Hotel and made a date with him. I told him I was just in from New York, and knew some people who knew him. I met him at the Glaston Cafe."

RICK reached over and took her hand. Neither of them seemed to notice it.

"I don't know whether he believed me or not. I don't think he did. But he didn't seem to care. He got drunk at the Glaston and I tried to stay fairly sober. I tried to make him talk—I succeeded. He started way back when he was a boy, and told me his life's history up to that night. He told me all about the people he'd killed and the police he's fooled."

Lorelei Harlow's fingers were wrapped tightly around Rick's hand.

"He told me he'd done the Lakeview Avenue killing," she said in a whisper. "And he said he was going to get away with it."

There was silence. Rick sat thinking of Spider Pelle sitting across a table from Lorelei, piling lie on lie. Spider had always been a talker. Spider would have admitted murdering McKinley if he thought it would help him make a girl with a body like Lorelei Harlow's.

"We went to his room in that—hotel," she said. "I had a small gun in my purse. I'd planned how I was going to kill him. He was going to know who I was and why he was dying."

"But you didn't get a chance to do it that way."

"I didn't get a chance. He—he was a pretty fast worker. He had most of his clothes off before I'd shut the door. Then he had some of mine off. He pulled me down on the bed and I guess I went into a complete panic. I don't know where the blackjack came from. It must have been lying on the bed."

"It could have been," Rick said. "Plasterers leave their trowels lying around. Mechanics lose their wrenches."

"Anyway—I hit him with it—and I was lucky. I stunned him and he fell over on his side. Then I—just kept on hitting him. I hit him until I was tired. Then I staggered into the bathroom and was sick.

"I got out," she finished, "as soon as I could. Down in the lobby I found the key to the door still in my hand. For some reason I went around the desk and put it in the box. There was no one there. I didn't see anyone. No one saw me."

There was quiet for some time. Then Rick said, "You were very sure

he did it?"

"Yes. I was sure. He admitted it. He—" She suddenly turned her eyes on Rick. Panic flared brightly in their green depths. "He *did* do it, didn't he? It *had* to be him!"

"Yes, he did it. Always remember that. The police were right. The papers were right. He did it."

Rick got slowly to his feet. Lorelei Harlow had to believe that. She believed it now. She'd keep on believing it, he thought. She'd never crack up with that anchor to hang to. He said, "You'd better try and get some rest. And after Grant's funeral a vacation might help. Get away and forget."

As he walked away, she was still staring out the window. . . .

THE Packard looked forlorn, standing in the haze by the cemetery gate. Rick pushed his keys into Crandell's hand. "You drive," he said. Rick crawled in beside the wheel and hunched down into his coat collar, while Crandell went around and labored in from the other side.

He kicked the starter, then turned and said, "She wants to see you. Look." Rick turned his eyes toward the cemetery gate.

Lorelie Harlow was hurrying along the gravel path. One hand was almost waving at them, but not quite.

"Let's go," Rick said.

"But she—"

"I told you—let's go!"

Crandell's round eyes got a little rounder.

"Okay—Okay. Don't get touchy."

The Packard pulled slowly away, gradually picked up speed.

Rick stared out through the windshield—out through the late spring rain sluicing down its glass surface.

"It's coming down harder," Crandell observed.

"Yeah." Rick closed his eyes. He was tired.

THE LANGUAGE OF CRIME

By JUNE LURIE

CRIMINALS through history have added colorful words to our everyday vocabulary, but as the years pass their origins and early definitions fade and are replaced by new meanings. It is often amusing to hark back to the "good old days" and examine a few of these words.

Let's start with a simple one. We are sure we know what a *bootlegger* is: someone who sells illegal liquor. But originally the word was borrowed from our early backwoods days. The settlers prohibited the sale of liquor when they realized the demoralizing effect it had on the Indians. Frontiersmen continued to smuggle it through for some time, however—by concealing their illegal supplies in the tops of their high boots!

Everybody knows a *cop* is a policeman. But how did he get that nickname? Its origin goes back to the early nineteenth century in our country, when the Bowery Theatre in New York had a series of fires. The playhouse was then one of the finest and largest in the United States, but between 1826 and 1838 it withstood three fires. Then again within a few years it caught fire.

The police, newly outfitted in fine uniforms with shiny brass buttons, quickly appeared on the scene to clear the way for the firemen. Bowery gangsters, whose power in those days was not to be underestimated, also appeared. They ridiculed the policemen and their brand-new uniforms and refused to do as they were told. A battle ensued between the two factions, and many people were injured. The police, unfortunately, got the worst of it; and to make matters worse for these men on the side of the law a protest arose that American policemen with their fancy uniforms were trying to imitate the English bobbies. So much ill-will was thus created that for a number of years thereafter only a star-shaped copper shield identified a man as a policeman. It is from these copper shields that the nickname of *copper* or *cop* were derived.

Decimate or "to take the tenth part of" is a word less often used in everyday speech. It is certainly one which seems to have no connection with criminality, yet its original meaning is directly concerned with crime. The word is derived from Latin, meaning to choose each tenth person for punishment, generally by death. Mutineers in our early history were often punished in this way, and rebels who urged action contrary to the prevailing military or naval laws were often selected to die for the offense.

...BUT IS IT ART?

by HARRISON B. LATIMER

It took a supposed art critic to learn that the surest method of covering up a crime is to have the police call the victim a liar

He had no chance to cry out a protest before the bullet cut him down

FOR more years than she cared to remember Mrs. Frobish had felt that her life lacked certain things. This lack she attributed directly to her lack of the money with which to buy them. Now that she was rich enough to buy everything she wanted she was determined to make up for lost time.

Her first purchase had been a fine home in an exclusive section of the city and she wasted no time in staffing it with an assortment of help which ranged from second maid to social secretary. She had also stuffed it with a collection of expensive but oddly assorted antique and new furniture.

At the moment Mrs. Frobish was concentrating on art, spelled A-H-T.

When Miss Wales, her social secretary, came into the drawing room she found her employer directing the hanging of her first acquisition, a portrait of a young woman overabundantly endowed by nature.

"A little more to the left, Stevens," Mrs. Frobish directed the butler. When he had it just where she wanted she changed her mind.

"No," she mused, "that won't do at all! Move it back again."

Stevens was tired. The portrait, in its massive frame, was exceedingly heavy, and he had been at it now for an hour. Miss Wales took pity on him.

"I think that's just right," she remarked.

Mrs. Frobish was startled. "I didn't hear you come in," she said. "Did you order the flowers?"

"Yes. They'll be here before dinner." Miss Wales stared up at the portrait. "You didn't tell me you'd bought a picture."

Mrs. Frobish smiled. "I bought it last week. I attended a lecture one night on the importance of art in our daily lives and I thought to myself that I should really take more of an interest in it so I went out and bought this."

Miss Wales blushed slightly as she gazed at the expanse of pink flesh so immodestly displayed. "It . . . it is very artistic," she commented.

"It should be!" her employer snorted. "I paid enough for it! People in the art business are supposed to be impractical but I can tell you that they're as sharp as the next. I had to cough up plenty for it!" She reminded herself not to use the expression "cough up" again.

"I'm afraid that I don't know a great deal about painting," Miss Wales said, "but I'm sure it must be worth it."

"Gosset Reynal, the art critic, will be my guest at dinner this evening, and I'll get his opinion on it," Mrs. Frobish told her.

GOSSET REYNAL made his living, meager as it was, from wealthy but uncultured women like Martha Frobish, but she didn't know that. She was conscious only of his polished, elegant manner and of the glibness with which he recounted his exploits in the field of art.

Actually his exploits were few. In younger days he had been a mediocre painter but had given that up. Now and then he wrote articles on art for the Sunday supplements. His income, however, was derived mainly from the galleries into which he steered women like Mrs. Frobish. If they bought, he got a commission. Mrs. Frobish talked as though she were going to be a particularly good client.

"I've really just started my collection," she told him as they finished their dinner. "My first picture came today."

He tried to sound enthusiastic. "How nice! I must see it. Where did you get it?"

"At Reeves and Sutton," she informed him. "I passed there one day last week and decided to go in. This particular picture caught my eye and I felt I had to have it. It should have been delivered days ago but they had a great deal of trouble with it."

"Trouble? How do you mean?"

"Well, first of all I didn't like the frame. Mr. Reeves insisted that it was the frame that had been on it since it had been painted. I told him that any time I paid two thousand dollars for a picture it would have a frame I liked."

"That seems only fair," Reynal commented.

"Doesn't it! But he was really huffy about it. When I insisted he said that he would reframe it himself. That

wasn't the last though! The next morning he called to tell me that when they removed the frame they found a tear near the corner. He wanted me to come down and pick out another or get my money back. I told him I didn't want another picture and that if he didn't send it right out I would sue him!"

Gosset Reynal's relations with Reeves and Sutton had never been too cordial. They had found that sometimes, after his commission had been paid, his clients wanted to return their purchases.

"They probably found another customer who was willing to pay more and thought they could get you to give it up," he suggested.

"Just what I thought!" Mrs. Frobish said. "I told him to fix the corner and send it right out! He tried to talk me out of it but I wouldn't let him."

"By the way," Reynal wanted to know, "what picture is it that you paid two thousand for?"

Mrs. Frobish took his arm and steered him toward the drawing room. "It's a Holleb," she said. "The name is 'Girl Dressing.' It's a picture of a young women in her boudoir."

Reynal nodded. "I know it quite well. Two thousand seems a stiff price though. I should have thought they'd be anxious to get it to you."

"Do you think I overpaid?" she asked.

Reynal had to think a moment before answering. He did not want her to feel cheated because it might make her too wary in the future.

"No," he said. "If the picture is in good condition it is worth it—although if I had been with you I might have been able to get it for a little less."

She rose to the bait. "Well," she hesitated, "I really don't know a great deal about art. Perhaps you would be kind enough to assist me in my next purchase."

"It would make me very happy to do so," he assured her. They entered the drawing room.

"There it is," she said unnecessarily, for the painting occupied a huge portion of the wall opposite them. "What do you think of it?"

REYNAL winced inwardly at the incongruity of the modern frame with the seventeenth century painting, but said nothing. It was when he came closer to examine the painting itself that his eyes began to glint strangely. He leaned forward to make sure that he had not been mistaken. He had not!

"Do you like it?" Mrs. Frobish asked eagerly. He disregarded her question.

"Reeves and Sutton, did you say?" he asked. She nodded.

"Hmm . . . Two thousand?" Again she nodded, puzzled.

Reynal looked at his watch. It was almost eight o'clock. He turned to her apologetically and sighed.

"I'm frightfully sorry to be so rude," he said. "But I must go now. There's a paper I must prepare for a symposium on modern art."

"But . . . But the painting! You haven't given me your opinion on it!"

He waved his hand vaguely. "Oh, it really takes more than a cursory examination to be sure. If you'll allow me, I'd like to come back tomorrow and look it over more carefully."

"Certainly, I should be happy to get your considered opinion on it."

She was left staring bewilderedly at the door as it closed behind him. Really! His haste to get away was positively indecent! She put it down to what she called "artistic temperament."

REYNAL was feeling quite satisfied with himself as he walked south along Michigan Boulevard. For the first time in his career he could see ahead a period of financial security. And all because he had been clever enough to see the significance of one little detail!

Had he not been so occupied with his thoughts Reynal might have noticed that he was being followed, for although the hour was not late there were few people about.

Even after he turned east on Erie street which was not nearly so well lit and devoid of other pedestrians, Reynal remained unaware that he was being tracked. His pursuer slowly cut down the distance between them until, as they passed a street light, only a few yards separated the two.

As the light fell behind and the darkness surrounded them, the gap was closed. The first intimation Gosset Reynal had that he was not alone was when he felt something hard press into his back.

"Into that passageway," a voice hissed in Reynal's ear.

The exhilarated feeling was replaced by a nausea in the pit of Reynal's stomach. Terror-stricken, he complied with the order and turned left, into the areaway between two old buildings.

At last he found his voice. "Wait," he begged through parched lips, "I'll forget all about it. I'll never bother you again. I'll . . ."

The muffled bark of the gun cut him off. A single snarled word was his epitaph as the killer spoke again. "Fool!"

MRS. FROBISH received Detective Tom Ritchie in her drawing room. He was a tall, thin, but good-humored man. For a few seconds he did not speak as he looked about the room appraisingly. At last Mrs. Frobish broke the silence.

"My butler tells me that you are a detective, Mr. Ritchie. I can't imagine what you might want with me."

He studied her. "When was the last time you saw Gosset Reynal, Mrs. Frobish?"

She was startled. "Why, yesterday evening. He had dinner here and left about eight o'clock."

"Did he seem upset or nervous?"

"Why are you asking me these questions?"

"Because Reynal was murdered last night at about eleven o'clock."

Mrs. Frobish's eyes grew wide. "Murdered! But why? Who would do such a terrible thing?"

Ritchie smiled faintly. "If you read the papers you'll see that it happens quite frequently. As to *who* did it and why, that's just what we're trying to find out. From what you have said you are the last person to have seen him alive."

"I can assure you—" she started. Ritchie cut her off.

"I'm quite certain you didn't do it, Mrs. Frobish. I did hope, since we found your dinner engagement listed in his appointment book, that you were friendly enough with Mr. Reynal to know of any possible enemies he may have had."

"Actually I hardly knew Mr. Reynal," she told the detective. "I met him only recently. He was an art critic and I thought he might be able to assist me; I am starting a collection."

"I see. He left here alone?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact he was rather in a hurry, too."

"How do you mean, in a hurry?" Ritchie's eyes narrowed.

Mrs. Frobish hesitated for a moment. "It was strange. We were standing in this very room, discussing that painting on the wall, when Mr. Reynal

suddenly glanced at his watch and announced that he had to leave immediately. He said that he had forgotten all about an article he had to write and he wanted to finish it last night. It was the first time he had mentioned it."

The detective was thoughtful. "It couldn't have been that urgent because he didn't go home. We found the key to his apartment on his bureau where he apparently forgot it. It would have been necessary to ring the bell for him to get in. Did he say what the article was about?"

"Something about a symposium on modern art."

Ritchie made a note of that and went back to his questioning. "You say he didn't seem nervous?"

"Quite the contrary. He was in excellent spirits during dinner. I may have been imagining things but it seemed to me that his manner changed when we came in here and he looked at the painting."

THE detective took another long look at the picture on the wall. "I'm afraid that I don't know much about art. That painting might be worth ten dollars or a hundred dollars; I wouldn't know the difference."

Mrs. Frobish's mouth turned down. "It may interest you to know that it cost me exactly two thousand dollars!"

It was Ritchie's turn to gasp. "Two thousand dollars! Why, I've seen better looking girls in the *Police Gazette!*"

"There are some paintings that are worth a good deal more than that. Now, did you come here for information or to criticize my painting?"

Ritchie got back to the subject. "It was the first time he had seen the painting?"

"Yes, I just got it yesterday although I bought it over a week ago."

The detective listened patiently to her recital of her difficulties in getting it delivered.

"I told Mr. Reynal where I had purchased it—at Reeves and Sutton—and he seemed interested. Then we came in here and he studied it at a distance for a few seconds. When he got a closer look at it he became thoughtful. He asked me again how much I had paid for it and where I had bought it. I asked him if he would give me his opinion on it and he said he would have to make a more careful examination to be sure. Then he looked at his watch. In just another minute he was gone."

"That's very interesting. He was going along fine until he saw the picture and then he suddenly remembered that he had work to do! Do you think the fellow who painted it might have been a friend of his?"

"Don't be ridiculous! The man who painted that picture died over two hundred years ago!"

Ritchie's face got red but he stuck to his job. "Well, it's the only clue we have so far. Would you mind telling me again where you bought it?"

He jotted down her answer and thanked her. He was in the hallway when he turned back for another look at the painting. Mrs. Frobish heard him muttering to himself.

"I still say two thousand bucks is too much for a picture of some fat dame without any clothes on!"

But Tom Ritchie was too old a hand to pass up any possible leads and it was obvious that if pictures were worth that kind of money they might quite possibly furnish the motive for a murder.

Unfortunately his ignorance of art was abysmal. He wracked his brain for a possible source of information. He was almost back at headquarters when he suddenly wheeled the car around. He had thought of just the man to give him the information he wanted.

HE PULLED up before the *Daily Courier* building and hurried in. The elevator whisked him up to the art critic's office. Ritchie had met him once before and Morton Bassett remembered him.

He smiled when he saw Ritchie enter. "I'll go quietly, officer," he said.

The detective grinned. Bassett was a white-haired man who had started as a reporter on the *Courier* years before. Now he was known as one of the ablest art critics in the country.

"What brings you here?" he asked. "Don't tell me that our detectives are becoming patrons of the arts!"

"Nothing like that," the detective assured him. "But I have run into something where a little knowledge of art might help."

"Be glad to help you in any way I can," Bassett told him. The older man puffed at his pipe while Ritchie told him what he wanted.

"Did you know Gossett Reynal?" the detective queried.

"So that's it! Well, I knew him only slightly. He was on the fringe of the art circle here in town. Every now and then I'd run into him at a show."

"On the fringe? I thought he was a critic—that he was quite an authority and wrote articles on art."

Bassett laughed. "Once in a while the *Courier* bought an article from him. Something sensational usually, that we could use on Sunday. I read all the serious art publications and I've never seen anything by him in them. From what I've heard, he made his living by acting as a commission man for some of the less reputable dealers in town."

Ritchie looked in his notebook. "Are Reeves and Sutton considered reputable?"

The art critic stared at him. "I should say they are! Don't tell me they're in any way mixed up in his death."

The lieutenant shook his head. "So far I don't know who's mixed up in it! That's the only lead I've got though. Do you happen to know whether Reynal had any enemies?"

"None that I know of. From what I've heard he was not well liked but I've never heard of him having any serious trouble."

Ritchie thanked him and started to go but Bassett stopped him.

"What's this about Reeves and Sutton?" he wanted to know. "Henry Sutton is an old friend of mine and I'd like to know how he got mixed up in this."

The lieutenant told him. "So the only lead I have," he finished, "is that he was acting normal until he saw this picture and then he made a lame excuse and rushed away."

"Perhaps his excuse was legitimate," Bassett suggested.

Ritchie shook his head. "He didn't go home. When we examined his room we found no indication that he was writing any article. From what he told Mrs. Frobish he had already started one and wanted to finish it."

Bassett puffed at his pipe reflectively. "What sort of a picture is it that Mrs. Frobish wanted his opinion on?"

Ritchie told him. "She said she paid two thousand for it. Could there be anything out of line there?"

The critic grinned. "No, but they certainly got top price from her. They probably would have asked a few hundred less if she'd been a connoisseur."

The lieutenant shook his head. "I never knew that painting was such a lucrative business."

"It wasn't at the time that picture was painted," Bassett explained. "Some of those artists were so poor that they couldn't even afford to buy paints or canvases. They mixed their own colors and picked up discarded paintings and

painted over them. Yet that period, the seventeenth century, was a time of great painters. In Holland, where Holleb lived, there were Rembrandt and Frans Hals. Today their paintings, especially Rembrandt's, are priceless."

"Live and learn," the detective said. "At any rate there seems to have been something about that picture that made Reynal leave earlier than he'd intended. How'd you like to go out with me and take a look at it?"

"Sure. It's seldom that there is any excitement in the life of an art critic and I still remember enough of my days as a reporter to be interested in a murder case. Let's go."

On their way Bassett explained to Ritchie as best he could what it was that made some paintings so valuable.

"Holleb is one of the better known naturalists. That is, he reproduced what he saw without improving on nature. His use of certain colors, like a deep gray, give his work a melancholy air that is distinctive."

MRS. FROBISH was nettled when she saw Ritchie again but changed to smiles when he introduced Morton Bassett. She led the two into the drawing room and pulled open the drapery to allow more light to fall on the painting.

Ritchie watched the critic closely as he approached the picture on the wall. His keen eye caught the sudden intake of breath and the widening of Bassett's eyes.

So there was something unusual about the painting!

At last the critic turned around. He paid no attention to Ritchie. "You bought this at Reeves and Sutton, Mrs. Frobish?" he asked. She nodded.

"Did Mr. Sutton himself wait on you?"

"No," she replied, "it was Mr. Reeves. He's a short nice-looking man with a waxed mustache."

Bassett nodded. "That's Reeves all right. And you say that you paid two thousand dollars for this?"

"Why, that's just how Mr. Reynal acted last night when he saw the painting!" Mrs. Frobish exclaimed. "Is there anything wrong with it?"

The critic was indirect in his answer. "I've known Henry Sutton for a good many years. I can't believe that he'd do anything— Do you have a bill for this, Mrs. Frobish?"

"No. I gave Mr. Reeves my check for the full amount when I bought the picture. That will serve as a receipt."

"Do you have the cancelled check, then?"

"It hasn't been sent from the bank. But I do have the check stub in my checkbook."

Mrs. Frobish left the room for a few minutes and returned with her checkbook which she opened and showed to Bassett. Ritchie studied the stub over the critic's shoulder. It was clearly made out for two thousand dollars to Reeves and Sutton.

"Thank you, Mrs. Frobish," Bassett said. He returned to Ritchie. "Shall we go, lieutenant? I must get back to the office."

They left Mrs. Frobish standing open-mouthed in the middle of the room.

"Now give!" the lieutenant ordered when he and Bassett were back in the car. "There's something fishy about that picture! You spotted it and Reynal spotted it and neither of you would tell Mrs. Frobish what it was!"

Bassett looked worried. "There is something wrong," he admitted. "I don't know the reason Reynal didn't tell Mrs. Frobish, but I wanted to talk to Henry Sutton before I said anything

to her."

"For God's sake, man, what is it?" Ritchie shouted.

"That isn't the original painting! It's a copy! Rather an obvious one at that." The critic spoke slowly. "I can't conceive of Sutton doing anything so stupid."

"Maybe he didn't know anything about it," Ritchie suggested. "It was his partner who sold it to her. What about him?"

"He's the son of Sutton's old partner who died last year."

"It could be that Reynal discovered the fraud and tried to blackmail him," the detective conjectured. "And Reeves killed him. Do you know where Reeves lives?"

"On Delaware street, not far from where Reynal's body was found. All the dealers and artists live on the near north side; it's a regular art colony there."

Bassett stared at Ritchie. "No!" he exclaimed, "it can't be! That's what I meant when I said that it would be stupid. The first person who knew anything about painting who saw that picture would see at once that it's a copy! They just *couldn't* get away with it!"

"Sometimes," the lieutenant said, "we overestimate a man's intelligence. I've found, though, that it's impossible to overestimate people's stupidity. Often we miss out because it seems impossible for a man to do anything as dumb as what he did!"

"We'll soon see," Bassett said moodily.

HENRY SUTTON was saying goodbye to a customer when they entered the gallery. It was obvious from the warmth of their greeting that Bassett and he were old and good friends. As the critic introduced him to Sutton, Ritchie studied him.

Sutton was a big man, well over six feet tall. His fleshiness was not offensive but rather gave him the appearance of a man who enjoyed life to the full. With his bristling mustache and his spade beard he looked more the military man than the connoisseur of art.

"Is young Reeves around, Henry?" Bassett asked him.

"No, he isn't. He's up at his apartment doing some work. I expect him in a few minutes though, if you don't mind waiting."

Sutton turned to Ritchie. "We have a workshop in back but Reeves prefers to do the more delicate work at home where he won't be interrupted."

"Is he good at it?" Bassett asked.

"Is he? I'll say he is! I don't mind telling you that he's putting this business back on its feet. You know that his father and I got so interested in art that we forgot about profits! Since he's been here he's turned some nice deals."

"So it seems," Ritchie muttered dryly. Sutton's face got red.

"How do you mean that, sir?" he growled.

"We want to talk to him about that painting he sold Mrs. Frobish," Bassett put in.

The art dealer stared at him. "Frobish!" he barked. "So that's her name! Some damn woman called a few minutes ago and wanted Reeves. I couldn't make out what the devil her name was or what she wanted of him. Something about a Holleb he sold her."

"That's the picture we want to see him about. Do you know anything about the transaction?" Bassett asked.

"Didn't know we had one!" Sutton snapped. "He must have bought it in the east while I was in Mexico looking for primitives. What about it?"

Ritchie took over. "He sold Mrs. Frobish the painting for two thousand dollars. Mr. Bassett says it's a copy, not the original."

The detective thought Sutton would explode. The dealer's face was apoplectic. "How dare you!" he roared. "Do you insinuate that Reeves and Sutton are crooks? I'll have you know that we have been recognized for fifty years as one of the finest houses in the world!"

"I'm not insinuating anything," Ritchie told him coolly. "I'm investigating the murder of Gosset Reynal and it looks as though the sale of that picture to Mrs. Frobish might have some bearing on the case."

The entrance of Reeves saved his older partner from a stroke. Ritchie's last statement had been too much for him.

REEVES was a man of about thirty. He was slight of build and dark. His waxed mustache gave him a Gallic appearance. Perplexed, he stared at his partner.

"What's going on?" he asked. He recognized Bassett and nodded to him. "Is there something wrong?" he asked Sutton.

"I'll say there's something wrong!" Sutton thundered. "This fool," he pointed to Ritchie, "has the infernal gall to suggest that we're crooks!"

The detective paid no attention to him. "Did you know Gosset Reynal?" he asked Reeves.

"Slightly," he nodded. "He tried to do business with us once. We didn't like his kind of business. I see that he got himself murdered last night. Probably a dissatisfied client."

"When was the last time you saw him?" Ritchie asked.

"Several months ago," Reeves told him. "I had some business in another gallery and he was in there with one of those women that he used to act as agent for."

"Let's get to the point!" Sutton snorted. It was plain that a murder was a minor affair when the honor of his firm was in danger. "Did you or did you not sell to a certain Mrs. Bobish or whatever her damn name is, a Holleb for two thousand dollars?"

His partner stared at him. "I sold a picture to a Mrs. Frobish one day last week. But it was only a copy of a Holleb and I certainly did *not* charge her two thousand dollars for it! It was two hundred, if I remember correctly!"

It was Ritchie's turn to stare. "Two hundred? Why, we saw the stub in her checkbook and it was made out for exactly ten times that!"

Reeves shook his head. "Something told me that I was going to have trouble with that woman! No sooner had she bought the picture than she wanted it reframed. It had a frame that suited it perfectly but I had to reframe it myself. If there were any mistake I knew I'd hear from her! Then I found a slight tear in a corner. To anyone else it would have meant nothing but I wanted no trouble so I called her to ask if she wouldn't take a different picture or take her money back. I was hoping she'd do the latter. Instead, she insisted that I was trying to cheat her and said that if I didn't get the picture out in a hurry she'd sue me! Now she tells people that we charged her two thousand dollars for that copy!"

He turned to Ritchie. "I don't care what her stub said. I have our record which I can show you. If that isn't enough you can probably get her bank to look up the check."

Reeves walked back toward the office and disappeared into it. In a

matter of seconds he was back with a ledger. The sale was listed quite clearly. The amount was two hundred dollars!

"Do you mind if I use your phone?" Ritchie asked. On being told they didn't, he walked back to the office. Within five minutes he returned.

"I noticed she banks at the First National so I just called them," he explained. "They told me that the check was for two hundred. I guess that settles that! Wonder why she made such a point of telling us she'd paid so much for it."

"Probably subconscious desire to own the original," Reeves suggested. "I told her that's what it would be worth. In that way she could pretend that she had bought it without having to lay out the necessary money. At any rate, we never had the original so I couldn't have sold it to her."

Ritchie nodded. "I imagine that explains it rather well. I'm sorry to have troubled you."

He and Bassett left. "I was sure that they didn't cheat her," the critic said. "I guess that explodes your theory that the picture might have had something to do with Reynal's death."

"It only proves that it didn't have anything to do with it in the way I thought it did. After all, Reynal didn't know that she wasn't telling the truth.

"You know," the detective continued, "that we're a little more scientific than we used to be. I had Reynal's clothes tested, X-rayed, and vacuumed for any possible clues. We found evidence that he had been in a studio! There was a tiny dab of gray paint on his coat cuff; it wasn't dry yet. There were also bits of art gum eraser that had got between the soles and uppers of his shoes. I'm certain that the art business is in some way connected with his murder and so far this is the only bit of art I've found that Reynal was interested in. Until I find another lead I'll have to follow this one."

BACK at headquarters, Ritchie went over the mass of reports that had already started to accumulate. He was soon disgusted. The entire machinery of the department had failed to turn up a single clue. Every motorman and conductor whose street car had passed through the near north side district between the hours of eight-thirty and eleven had been checked on. Every bus driver who had driven through the district in that period had been interviewed. Not one could recall seeing a man of Reynal's description.

Ritchie was left with his one thin thread to lead him through the labyrinth. There was nothing to do but follow it or give up and wait for a chance clue.

It would be fatal to wait. There was nothing to do but take the most likely path and keep on going. Yet the one avenue that held any promise seemed to have reached a blind end.

Ritchie shrugged. He was a patient man. It was going to take a lot of leg work to crack this case and he was ready to do it. He figured he might as well start right now.

He got out a classified directory and tore from it the page on which were listed the art dealers. Fortunately they were concentrated in the one section.

His procedure was simple and unvarying. He was looking for a Holleb, especially the one known as "Girl Dressing."

The dealers' replies were as unchanging as his questions. Yes, they

(Continued on page 164)

'I TALKED WITH GOD'

Impossible — you say? No, it is not impossible. You can do the same thing. For there has come to the earth a brilliant, shining revelation of the power of The Spirit of God. It has come because the human race, through the Atomic Bomb — could very easily annihilate itself. So the Spirit of God has spoken and the revelation and the Power that is following, staggers the imagination. In the past 18 years, MORE THAN HALF A MILLION people have told us without our asking them, what happened when they too discovered the actual and literal Power of The Spirit of God, right here on earth, in their own lives.

Dr. Frank B. Robinson

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I want you to know of this Power. I live for no other purpose. For when this dynamic, invisible Power changed my life, my duty was very plain. TELL OTHERS — that's what God said to me, and I've been doing that faithfully for the past 18 years. Write me a simple postcard, or letter, NOW, and ask me for my 6000 word message, which will give you a slight insight into the most soul-stirring revelation from God this world has ever known. Address me as follows: —"DR. FRANK B. ROBINSON, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho and this message, which is TOTALLY FREE, will be sent by mail immediately. **But write now—ere you forget.** The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 47-2, Moscow, Idaho.

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(Advt.)

(Continued from page 162)

knew the painting. No, they didn't have it, nor could they tell him where he might be able to get it.

It was at the Allman Galleries that he finally struck pay dirt! Mr. Allman himself waited on him. The art dealer was a scholarly looking man who evidently knew his business.

"I have several others by Holleb," he told the detective. "But not the one you're referring to. Would you be interested in one of the others?"

"No. That's the only one I'd want. Do you happen to knew who has the original?"

Allman thought for a moment. "I know I saw it at one of the galleries only a short time ago. I'll think of where it was in just a second."

At last he got it. "At Reeves and Sutton! I went down there one morning last week to see Henry Sutton but he was out of town. Reeves was unpacking some stuff and I noticed the Holleb among some others. They may still have it."

Ritchie shook his head. "They had a copy. I want the original."

Allman looked surpised. "A copy? That's odd. I didn't get too close to it but I'd have sworn it was the original. First of all, it was a painting, not a photographic reproduction or lithograph. Then, too, the color was so distinctively Holleb. Of course, I may have been mistaken."

"Is there any way of finding out who had the original last?" the lieutenant asked.

The dealer had the answer to that. "It was in an eastern collection for years. The owner died several years ago and the collection was broken up. Since many collectors are reticent about their acquisitions it would be hard to trace it unless an institution bought it. I happen to know that the painting is not hung in any institution in this country. I'm afraid you're up against it if no other will do."

"Is it possible," Ritchie asked, "that a dealer might sell the original, thinking it was a copy?"

Allman laughed. "There have been cases where some priceless object of art has lain in antique shops or junk shops for years until some lucky person has bought it for next to nothing. It's hardly likely though that it would slip by any dealer who knew his business. If it happened to me I'd want to blow my brains out."

The detective grinned. "I can see where it would be a terrible blow to a dealer's prestige if it got out that he'd let something like that slip past him."

He thanked the dealer and left. For a moment there he'd thought he had something! Still in the same blind alley. Or was he?

THERE is a particular time in every case when the investigator must decide that he has the necessary information to at least formulate some constructive hypothesis. If he lets that moment slip he is lost. Ritchie knew that he had that information; it was already an instinct that told him.

It was apparent that he had reached the dead end. Now it was a matter of retracing his steps and finding the slip that the killer must have made. For Ritchie was sure that a slip had been made! He was certain, yet he could not put his finger on it.

Mrs. Frobish was surprised, if not gratified, to see him again so soon. It was, however, a much chastened woman who greeted him. She had evidently spoken to Reeves.

"I don't know how I could have made such a mistake," she murmured weakly. "I feel an utter fool. All my

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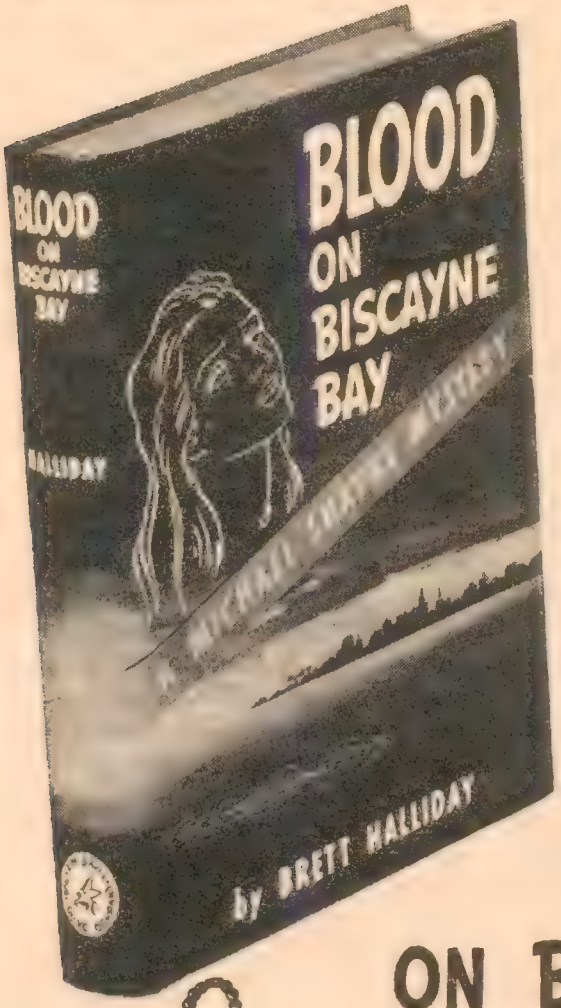

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(Continued from page 164)
friends have heard that I bought an old master and now it turns out that it's only a cheap reproduction! I'm a laughing stock."

Ritchie almost felt sorry for her. He could imagine how she had felt when her little triumph turned to dust. Or had it? It was always possible that she knew more than she let on. Could it be that it was Reeves, not she, who had made the mistake?

"I'd like to borrow that painting for a few days," he told Mrs. Frobish. I'm sure the clue to the murderer is in there."

"You may not only borrow it, you may have it! I certainly don't want that thing staring me in the face any longer!"

The butler helped Ritchie carry it out to the car. This was better than he had hoped for!

Back at headquarters, he set the painting up in his office. It looked no different than when he had first seen it. Locking the door to shut out interruptions, he set to work removing the frame. He had to be careful not to damage the painting in any way.

When he had got the frame off he laid the painting flat on the floor and got down on his hands and knees to examine it. There was a thin layer of lacquer over it and he began to scrape at this with his pocket knife. In half an hour he was down to the canvas all around the edge. And there was no sign of a tear or a mended place!

So Mrs. Frobish had been lying! This was not the picture she had bought from Reeves! But why should she lie?

Ritchie tried vainly to think of a good reason. After all, it would have been a feather in her cap to have bought an original Holleb for only two hundred dollars. Why should she try to conceal it?

In any case, what had Reynal to do with it? How could he have hoped to profit from Reeves' mistake? Put that way it just didn't make sense.

And the torn corner? What the devil could that mean? It didn't take an art expert to see that this canvas was as good as new!

It was evident that he would have to learn something about painting to crack this case. Not much hope there either, for Bassett had seen nothing more than that it was a copy and he was an expert.

Reason and instinct both told Ritchie that there was more to it than that. Either this copy or its original had led Gosset Reynal to his death, and Ritchie was determined that it would lead him to Reynal's killer if he had to take a course in art school to figure it out!

ON HIS way home the detective stopped at the library and went in. When he came out his arms were full of books on seventeenth century art. He knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep anyway, so he had thought of a profitable way to spend the night.

If artists had seemed to him an odd lot before, he had more respect for them after a few hours of reading. Most of them had been desperately poor, using whatever materials lay at hand or that they could make themselves, and yet they turned out art that was priceless.

Ritchie gasped when he read some of the prices that had been paid for the work that these same artists had done. It was hardly credible that a painting could be worth a hundred thousand dollars or more and yet it must be true. He read on, fascinated.

And when his mind was so full of art and artists, paintings and painters, that he thought it would burst, he had

the answer!

It made sense! Now he had the motive for Reynal's death. Now he knew what it was that Reynal had discovered that had cost him his life! And how it was that Mrs. Frobish had made such an absurd mistake!

And most important of all, he had discovered what the torn corner meant. He fell asleep with a smile on his face and awoke to find the sun streaming into his room.

His first call was to Mrs. Frobish. "Meet me at Reeves and Sutton in an hour," he hold her. He hung up before she could ask him any questions.

His next call was to headquarters. That one took a little longer. When he was through with that he looked up Henry Sutton's number and asked him to be at the gallery in an hour. After that he called Reeves and Bassett.

He took his time about getting there and found everyone waiting for him. Sutton gave him an openly belligerent stare.

"Well," he demanded, "have you come here to insult us again?"

Ritchie smiled. "No," he said, "but I have figured this thing out and since everyone here is concerned I wanted to have you all together."

Bassett looked puzzled. "I don't see how I'm connected with the case in any way."

"You're not, really. But it happens that you're the one who gave me the clue that led to the solution. I didn't get it at the time, but it finally came to me during the night. I thought you might be interested since it's in your line."

"Would you mind getting on with your explanation instead of keeping us standing here?" Sutton snorted.

"Don't worry," the detective told him, "you're going to be plenty interested in what I have to say!"

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and Vital INCHES of
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HE TURNED his attention to the others. "You see," he explained, "I felt all along that the painting that Mrs. Frobish bought held the key to Reynal's murder."

"But how?" Bassett interrupted. "I thought we had that all cleared up yesterday."

"We established the fact that the painting which hung in Mrs. Frobish's home was a copy," Ritchie said, "But that's all we did establish. Don't forget that it was not the picture I was interested in, it was Reynal's murder that I had to solve.

"I was certain that the picture had led to his death. But why? Men are not murdered without cause. Usually it is passion of one kind or another that prompts violence. In this case there didn't seem to be any passion. Reynal was mildly disliked by everyone who knew him but nobody hated him enough to kill him.

"That left money as the only other motive for murder. Since no attempt to rob him had been made it was clear that robbery was not the motive. Perhaps the money was connected with the picture. But how could Reynal hope to make any money out of that?

"Mrs. Frobish told Reynal that she paid Reeves and Sutton two thousand dollars for the painting. The moment he looked at it he could see that it was a copy. Either Mrs. Frobish had made a mistake or Reeves had cheated her!"

"I thought we had that out yesterday!" Sutton blurted. His face was getting flushed again.

Someone entered the store at that moment and Reeves started to see who it was. Ritchie stopped him.

"It's one of my men," he said. The man carried something rolled up in a piece of wrapping paper. Before he reached the group the door opened again and another detective entered. He handed the lieutenant a white envelope.

Ritchie got back to his explanation. "The point was, what large sum of money could be involved in the transaction?

"If Reeves had tried to cheat Mrs. Frobish that would explain everything. But he hadn't! Discovery would have been too sure in the first place. Secondly, her check was made out for two hundred dollars.

"Was it possible that he had sold her the original, believing it to be a copy? I found a dealer yesterday who remembered seeing the painting here one morning last week. He had thought it was an original.

"But why should Mrs. Frobish conceal that fact? I could think of no reason. Also, since the picture that Mr. Bassett saw was a copy, that would have meant that she had procured a copy and hung it in place of the original. And she had received that painting the very same day that Reynal saw it! Almost certainly she was innocent of such skullduggery.

"One thing was apparent. There had been a great to-do about a cheap picture! Mrs. Frobish wanted the picture reframed. Reeves insisted that the frame which was on it was the one which had originally been made for it.

"What difference did it make what kind of frame a cheap copy had? Then he said that he reframed it himself. It's hard to believe that he would take so much trouble with anything but a valuable painting."

HENRY SUTTON cut him off. "Are you suggesting that Reeves sold Mrs. Frobish the original in some fantastic conspiracy to defraud me of my share of the proceeds?"

Ritchie laughed. "That possibility did occur to me, I confess. I rejected

it because in that case the stakes would have been too small. If he had to split with Mrs. Frobish he would show a profit of only nine hundred. I was positive that she didn't know what was going on. I was also positive that he intended to cheat you out of a good deal more than that!"

It was Reeves who was excited now. "Of all the idiotic—!" He choked on his words.

"It does sound crazy," the detective admitted. "Let's get a little background though. You bought the picture in the east while your partner was down in Mexico. He knew nothing about it.

"When he came back the picture had already been sold. For all he knew you had bought and sold an inexpensive copy of a famous painting. It would be easy to alter any record you had of the transaction."

Reeves threw up his hands in disgust. "I suppose I'm forced to listen to this preposterous accusation but don't think it will end here! You'll be walking a beat when this farce is over!"

Ritchie paid no attention to his outburst. "Another odd fact was that no sooner had you sold the painting to Mrs. Frobish than you wanted her to come and get her money back. She, thinking that you had found some other customer who was willing to pay more for it, refused to do so and insisted you deliver the painting.

"You couldn't do that so you sent a copy! When Reynal saw it he knew something was up and he tried to turn it to his own profit. He went to your apartment and found you there. I don't know how he guessed exactly what you were doing but he did. He demanded either half the money or else he tried to blackmail you. In either case you weren't going to let him get

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away with it. You followed him when he left and after he'd got a safe distance from your place you murdered him!"

It was Morton Bassett who stopped him now. "But that assumes that Reeves sold Mrs. Frobish the original. We know that she only paid two hundred dollars for it," he expostulated.

"We've been too quick to assume that because Mrs. Frobish didn't know anything about art she didn't know anything else—not even how much she paid for that painting! Actually she had given Reeves a check for two thousand just as she thought she had! The check is in this envelope. It was easy for an expert at retouching like Reeves to change it."

Bassett was incredulous. "Then you mean to say that he really altered her check? That he *lowered* it to two hundred?"

Ritchie grinned. "That's just what he did! First time I ever heard of it. That's what threw me off the track. But then I got the painting from Mrs. Frobish—the fact that she was willing to give it to me should clear her of any suspicion—and I found that he had really switched pictures on her!"

"Then where is the original?" Sutton roared. "If there was one why don't you produce it?"

THE lieutenant gestured to the man who held the brown paper package. Carefully the detective unrolled the canvas within and spread it over an easel that stood nearby.

It was a painting of a man in a plumed hat!

"Are you mad?" Henry Sutton thundered. "That's no Holleb!"

"Nevertheless," Ritchie assured him, "it's the picture Mrs. Frobish bought!"

Everyone was staring at him now, as though he had really taken leave of his senses. He grinned.

"I'm not crazy," he said. "At least Reeves doesn't think so any longer. You'll notice he's skipped out!"

In their surprise at the unveiling of the picture no one had noticed Reeves' departure.

"Don't worry," the lieutenant said. "He won't get far. I've got men stationed outside the front and back doors!"

He continued. "I won't hold you in suspense much longer. It was that business of the torn corner that tipped me off. There was no tear on the picture Mrs. Frobish had! Then why did Reeves say there was?

"It was a natural slip. The corner of the painting he had sold her *was* torn, so in his excitement he used that as an excuse for not delivering it.

"But what could the torn corner have meant? It was not until he had discovered it that Reeves realized how valuable the painting was. Why?

"Because that tear disclosed that there was another layer of paint underneath! And when he saw who had put it there he was determined not to let it get away from him!

"It was really Bassett who tipped me off. He told me that some of the painters in those days were so poor that they painted over used canvases!"

Bassett walked to the painting and bent to examine it. His eyes popped as he saw the name in the corner.

"Henry!" he shouted.

Sutton hurried to his side and they bent over the painting together. When they straightened the color was gone from the dealer's face. He stared at Ritchie. "Where did you get this?" he asked.

"As soon as Reeves left his apartment this morning my men went in," Ritchie said. "They found it there."

There was a bitter smile on Sutton's

face as he gave Mrs. Frobish a courtly bow. "I believe this belongs to you, madam," he said.

"Well, I don't like it!" she snapped. "If I can't have the picture I bought I want my money back!"

Sutton's manner was still courtly. "That wouldn't be fair. I haven't had time to appraise it properly, but if you are willing I shall be happy to give you twenty-five thousand dollars for it!"

"For heaven's sake," Mrs. Frobish gasped, "who *did* paint that?"

"Rembrandt," Sutton told her.

THE END

PENNIES ADD UP!

IT IS hard to conceive of anyone filing a suit for six cents. Yet that is exactly what a suburban resident of Chicago did not long ago. And the suit was filed against the Public Library! However, if it is upheld it may cost the library a great deal more than six cents—possibly $1,250,000.

In all seriousness the claimant hired a lawyer and filed his suit because, he said, he had been forced, by a threat to deprive him of his privileges, to pay a six cent fine for keeping a book longer than two weeks. According to the Chicago code it is only through court action that the library is legally permitted to collect fines.

Since 1872 book borrowers of the library have been paying their fines without consulting the law regarding it. If this one case is settled in the claimant's favor, it is just possible that the library will be paying its patrons over a million dollars in refunds.

A situation quite the reverse of the one in Chicago concerns a Public Library in another large city in the U. S. Thousands of books had been borrowed but never returned. Some were of little value, but others were rare editions or single-copy books that the library could not replace.

Declaring a moratorium, the Library posted notices that persons having any of these long-overdue books might return them without being fined or incriminated in any way.

To everyone's surprise and the library's delight, an overwhelming number of these books were returned, many of them having been withheld for years. Some were even delivered to the library from distant points outside the city. Though it is hard to think of them as thieves, that is what these book-borrowers had been until the library hit upon an idea that once again made them honest citizens.

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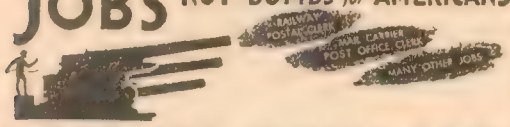

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THE INVISIBLE WITNESS

By GARY LEE HORTON

A CRIME committed in the haunts of the underworld always presents a greater challenge to the forces of law; however, the thoroughness and determination with which criminal investigation always presents an ultimate solution is such that society has little fear of lack of protection—even where the criminal preys. The murder of Miss Emily Farmer on notorious Commercial Road exemplifies this trust.

The Commercial Road district in London was an all too-familiar breeding place of crime and criminals to Scotland Yard and the local police force; but the murder of this small, elderly woman who owned a small business as a tobacconist and newsagent on the Road, seemed to arrest the attention and sharpen the imagination of more than the usual number of policemen assigned to patrol the sinister underworld area. The reason for this was simple. Not one clue was ever found (not even a fingerprint), yet the motive of the crime-robbery was immediately deduced by those who worked on the case. This baffling situation still remained even after full justice was deeded out to the wrong-doers.

Miss Farmer was a well-known character to the police for they often warned her to check her mania for wearing a great deal of valuable jewelry while she attended her shop. Despite several attempts at robbery in her shop, the elderly woman refused to heed the police warnings and, oddly enough, even refused to volunteer a description of her assailants. Such non-cooperation seemed very strange, indeed, since Miss Farmer considered her jewels more precious than life itself. Ironically enough, they were destined to take her life too in one of the most sordid crimes in the history of the district.

The ultimate result of such defiance occurred on the morning of October 12th when, after Miss Farmer had completed her morning routine of taking in her daily consignment of newspapers, her delivery boy found the door open and became suspicious of the absence of the old woman. Immediately after the boy discovered his employer's shoes and false teeth on the floor, he notified the police who, searching further, finally found the woman lying gagged and choked to death on her bed. Twine, the type which is used to tie up newspaper bundles, was used to tie her hands behind her back. Since one-half of her gold pince-nez was found lying broken on the floor and stairs of the shop and since the room was ransacked, robbery seemed to be the definite motive.

Other deductions came in logical succession as the investigation progressed. Since her neighbors reported no unusual disturbance during the night of the murder, it was believed that the murderer was acquainted with his victim, for surely Miss Farmer, ordinarily an active and self-pro-

tecting woman, would have struggled with her attacker. Initial inquiries which further complicated the search for clues revealed that the windows and back door were shut and that not a trace of the missing money or jewelry was to be found anywhere. Also, there were several lodging houses near the store where many notorious criminals were known to live. With these meager bits of information with which to proceed further, it would seem as if the police found themselves at a momentary standstill.

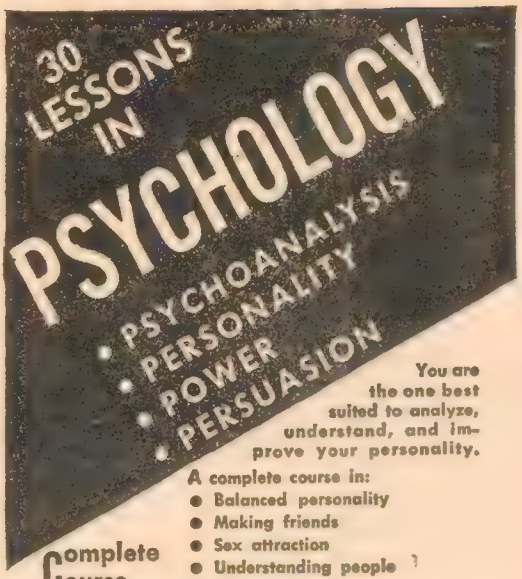
THE many misleading stories which those in the neighborhood volunteered to the authorities only complicated matters. The fateful break—which comes in every conflict of wits between police and criminal—came when a young man named Rae who worked as a fish curer at night near the scene of the murder told the police that the three suspects whom the police were holding on suspicion in the case, were not Miss Farmer's murderers. He added further that a friend of his had actually seen two men come out of Miss Farmer's shop at the time the murder was thought to have taken place.

Reluctant to leave any bit of information uninvestigated, Inspector Tom Divall who was in charge of the baffling case, followed this new lead. The descriptions of the two men which Rae gave to him matched with those of two widely-known underworld characters in the district. Young in age, Rae failed to give this information to police earlier because of fear of retribution by the gang to which the two suspects belonged.

Although Divall actually had no real evidence against them, he thought it quite logical to suspect Miss Farmer's mysterious intruders as being the two Rae identified. Their descriptions revealed them to be two half-brothers—Donovan and Wade—who were habitual robbers, violent in temperament and therefore, not above committing murder to obtain their loot. They were brawny and definitely lacking the brains and courage to commit more skillful crimes. After making another thorough investigation of his files, Inspector Divall suspected that Wade was the man who had previously attempted another robbery of Miss Farmer's jewels.

Since every thorough police investigation demands complete details of the suspect's personal background, his movements and associates, Divall grew more determined in his efforts and searched police records further. He found that Wade and Donovan frequently visited their mother's house on Commercial Road. Extra plainclothesmen were assigned to the case and kept vigilant watch on the day—Sunday—which both men usually preferred to visit their mother. Sunday too, it was decided, was an excellent time to raid the house for the two men would be least likely to consider such an intrusion on that day.

The stage was set and with more and more stories coming into the local police stations from



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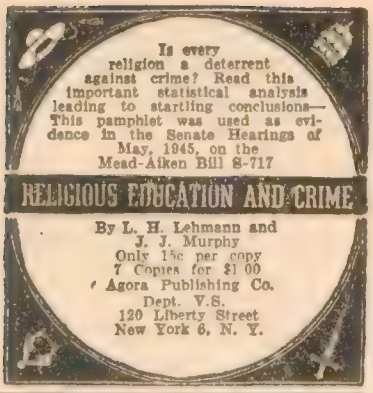
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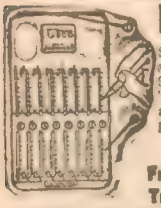

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folks in the district who definitely placed the two men near the Farmer shop, it seemed as if the final act to the week-long case was about to occur.

AND occur it did—on Saturday, the watchful plainclothesmen saw Wade and his girlfriend enter the house. They still waited patiently while their prey visited. They did not wait too long for the girl came out soon and, signaling Wade who was hiding in the doorway to follow her, Wade ran out and hopped on a passing streetcar. Detective Ben Leeson was in hot pursuit on the streetcar behind; however, he soon lost sight of Wade in the traffic jam. Another detective followed the girl to a house where she and Wade were living.

It was into this house on Sunday morning that Inspector Divall led his men and surprised Wade so much that he was too frightened to resist arrest. Now, with one suspect apprehended, all their attention was focused on capturing Donovan.

Proceeding in the same manner with their investigation, the police narrowed their search to a house in Limehouse where Donovan was known to have friends who would hide him. On the day they planned the raid, the police learned that the house was empty of any tenants other than Donovan. With the house completely surrounded, they rushed into the unsuspecting Donovan's room. The criminal reacted with the same fear and surprise as did his half-brother.

Booked as the murderers of Emily Farmer, Wade and Donovan looked to their coming trial and eventual execution with a contrasting difference. While Donovan considered the charges with a silent, defiant attitude, Wade immediately weakened with criminal cowardice and became abusive and excited, shouting again and again that he was entirely innocent of the cold-blooded murder.

Although Rae, the youngster who first submitted the tipoff about the two men, identified Wade and Donovan without the slightest hesitation, the police felt they still lacked another conclusive bit of evidence to clinch the case. Fortunately, Detective-Sergeant Ben Leeson discovered another person who was to prove of even greater aid to the prosecution's case than Rae's identification. This man, a Sunday school teacher, was the son of the caretaker of a chapel near the scene of the murder.

He too, like young Rae, had hesitated to volunteer any information to the police before the date, fearing that he would be at the mercy of the two suspects. Under further questioning, he revealed that on the night before the crime at about an hour before midnight, he had gone to the chapel to secure it for the night and he had seen two men standing near the Farmer shop. Again, before daybreak, while returning to the chapel, he noticed the two men near the shop door. This made possible a more positive identification

of the two men by the teacher. This he did, unhesitatingly, when Donovan and Wade were brought before him.

Strengthened by this new evidence, the case was finally brought to trial. All who worked on the case realized that because no definite clues were found which pointed to both men as the actual murderers of Miss Farmer, there was in reality little evidence which would send them to their deaths. It was the fact that the identifications were so positively accepted by all as being conclusive and without question which left the defense unable to offer any evidence to the contrary in behalf of the accused.

At the end of only a three day trial, Wade and Donovan were convicted of murder and condemned to death. Another victory for Scotland Yard!

HE LOVED TOO WELL
By ROSETTA LIVINGSTON

LOVE, it has been said, is responsible for the great success and happiness in the lives of many men. Here's the other side.

Herr Paul Grunenthal, who for years held one of the most important positions in the banking system of Germany, is an example of such a man. Though possessed of honor and prestige, a fine wife and family, he gave up everything for the love of a woman. And at last, when even that proved worthless, he gave up all hope of a better life and committed suicide.

In the early days of his career as director of the "Reichsdruckerei"—the printing works of the German State Bank—one would never have suspected the dire fate that lay in store for Paul Grunenthal. His life seemed calm, happy, and while he was highly regarded by a host of friends, he was envied by many for his influencial position.

As head of the printing department he had a most delicate duty—the examination of all the paper money that went through the presses. When those with flaws were found it was his job to set them aside, enter them in a ledger, and later burn them. Once asked what might happen if some of the faulty bills were stolen, Herr Grunenthal explained that he was solely responsible for them and that no one else ever saw them. When the faulty notes were destroyed new ones bearing the same series number were printed. Thus if the bad notes were not destroyed there would be duplicates in circulation.

"These bills hardly seem like money to me," Grunenthal once told a friend. "If I were dishonest and retained them I might never be detected because of the imperceptible flaws in many of them. But it is only a job to me—I have been doing it for years, and I am content with the money I earn honestly."

Yet within a year after this very conversation German marks totalling about $100,000 in American money were stolen from the Reichsbank—all

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in rejected bank-notes. And the criminal was none other than the honest director of the printing works, Paul Grunenthal!

THE story of the robbery and the subsequent downfall of Herr Grunenthal sounds more like fiction than truth, yet the details were accurately recorded in Berlin newspapers just as they occurred. Grunenthal had suddenly retired from his duties, left his wife and was leading a gay and abandoned life. His days were spent at the races, where it was reported that he won fabulous sums. At night he entertained lavishly for his friends—and a particular friend, Emma Gotz, at sumptious dinners and parties. It was on Emma that he showered most of his attentions and money. Having fallen madly in love with the depraved but beautiful young girl he established her and her grasping mother in a luxurious apartment and satisfied their every extravagant whim by means of his ill-gotten money.

But soon the bank-notes began to run out. Nor were Grunenthal's gains at the races as huge as he would have people think. Thoughts of his family and former happy life were depressing and he began to wonder if it had all been a terrible mistake. His conscience tormented him, and one day Grunenthal arrived home to find that someone from the Reichsbank had been there and requested that he appear the following day at the director's office. Frightened, he thought he must already be suspected, and began making plans for covering his guilt. He removed the last of the stolen bank-notes from his private safe and having decided on a hiding place for them, was about to leave.

Suddenly, panic-stricken, Grunenthal realized that someone was with him in his library—a glance in a mirror had revealed a shadowy figure behind a curtain. At first he thought it was the police and quickly hid the money in the safe again. But instead it was Heinrich Lange, Emma's secret lover, who had decided to cash in also, on her good fortune. A criminal himself, having served years in prison, he did not hesitate to threaten Grunenthal with blackmail and he ordered him to hand over a large sum of money plus the bank-notes. A fight between the two ensued, and Lange—to save himself—said he was Emma's half-brother. Grunenthal released him then and he left without the money.

Again Grunenthal set out on the secret task Lange had temporarily intercepted. Driving to the cemetery he sought his mother's grave where he planned to bury the bag of stolen money beneath the monument. Quickly he accomplished it and returned home, assured that for the time at least, he and his money were safe.

THE next day in Grunenthal's life reads like a drama with a dozen climaxes. Criminal that he was, one cannot help but feel a sympathy for this witless, love-sick man. At first the day began happily for him. The bank had only wanted his

opinion on a technical matter, and there was obviously no suspicion of him. But somewhat later, events took on an ironic turn for the worse. The Berlin newspapers reported a strange incident.

While replacing a temporary headstone for a permanent one over a child's grave the cemetery caretaker had found a huge package of money. Only then did Grunenthal realize the mistake he had made. And now, even were he never to be suspected of leaving the money, it would at the the same time never again be in his possession.

Life seemed black indeed for Herr Grunenthal. And it was to become rapidly worse. Then came still another climax and for a moment our villian caught his final glimpse of good fortune.

A man from whom he had carelessly bought a lottery ticket came to tell him he had won a great fortune—20,000 marks! Speechless with joy and excitement he ran to get the ticket which would verify his winning.

But within those few minutes the police were already arriving at Grunenthal's bachelor quarters. In a moment they had arrested him. Emma Gotz, her mother and Lange, believing there was no longer financial gain in remaining with Grunenthal, felt that their safest route lay in denouncing him, and they told the police everything except their own complicity.

Even at the trial the girl whom he loved and whom he thought loved him, gave the chief testimony against him. In short order Grunenthal was sentenced to fifteen years hard labor for his offense. But while being led from the courtroom to his cell up a winding staircase, he threw himself down the steps, committing suicide.

And so the pathetic life of Paul Grunenthal came to its tragic end. But the woman who had undoubtedly driven him to crime still lived.

Following the trial she returned to the home Grunenthal had provided for her, and it seemed that life would go placidly on for her.

But that night Lange came to call—stealthily through a window. Emma had confided to him that she still possessed $25,000 in bonds that Grunenthal had given her. Lange's interest in Emma had been as nefarious as hers in Grunenthal, and through him Emma Gotz received her just retribution.

Hearing an intruder, Emma awoke and shot wildly at him, not knowing it was Lange. The bullet missed, but with a single bound the enraged Lange drove a knife into her, killing her instantly. Then he proceeded to take every valuable, every bit of money and jewelry, and escaped.

It was not long, however, before the police seized Lange, and an executioner's axe brought another criminal to justice.

And last of all, retribution came to the evil mother of Emma Gotz, who for a short while lived royally on the wealth that first Grunenthal, then her daughter had left her. The Reichsbank took back all her ill-gotten possessions and returned her to her former station in life—a paper-seller in the streets of Berlin.

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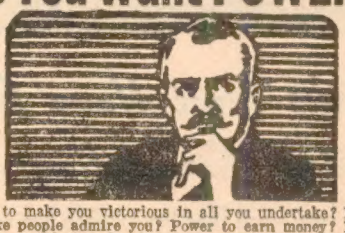

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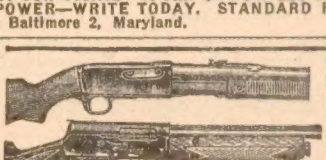

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